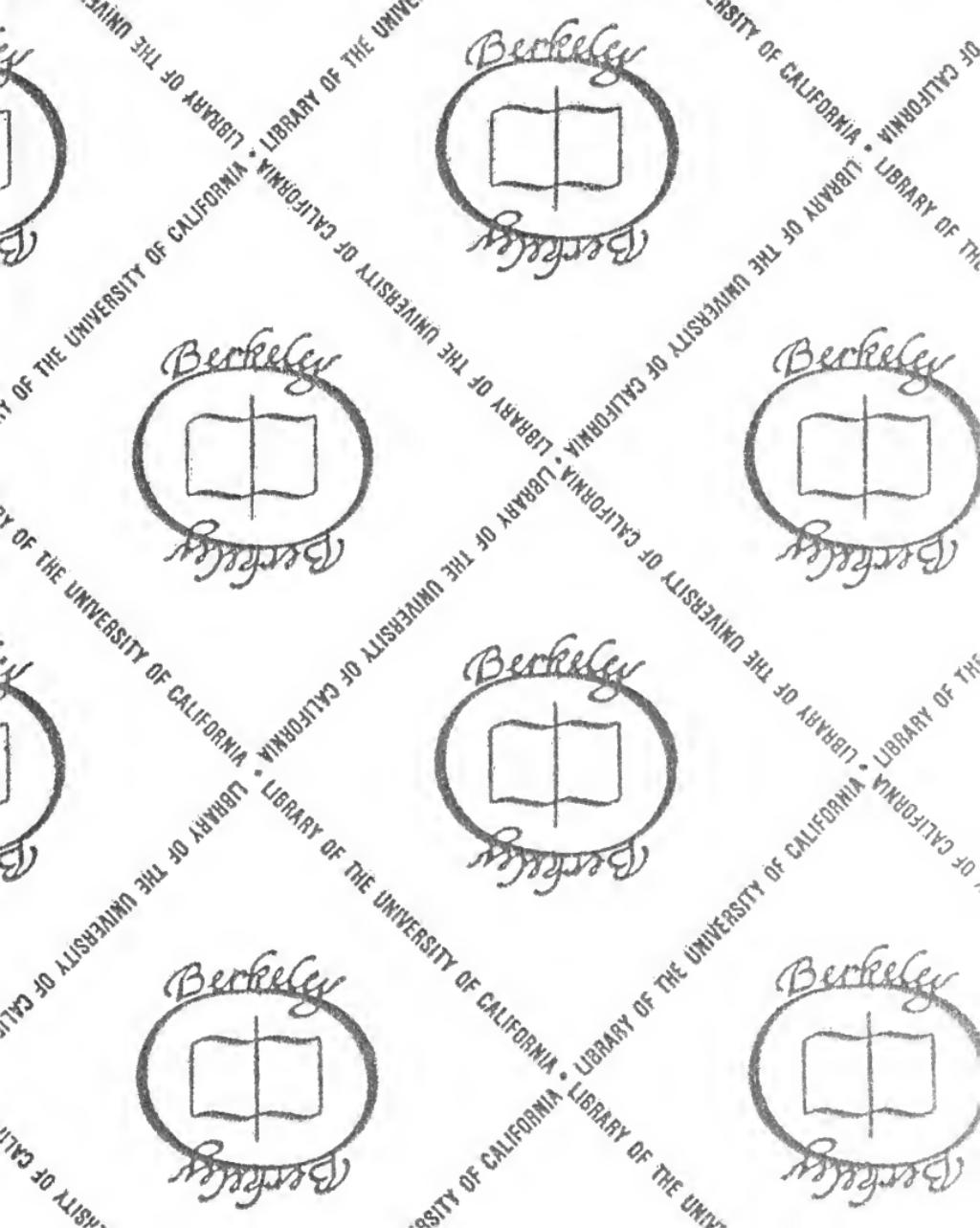
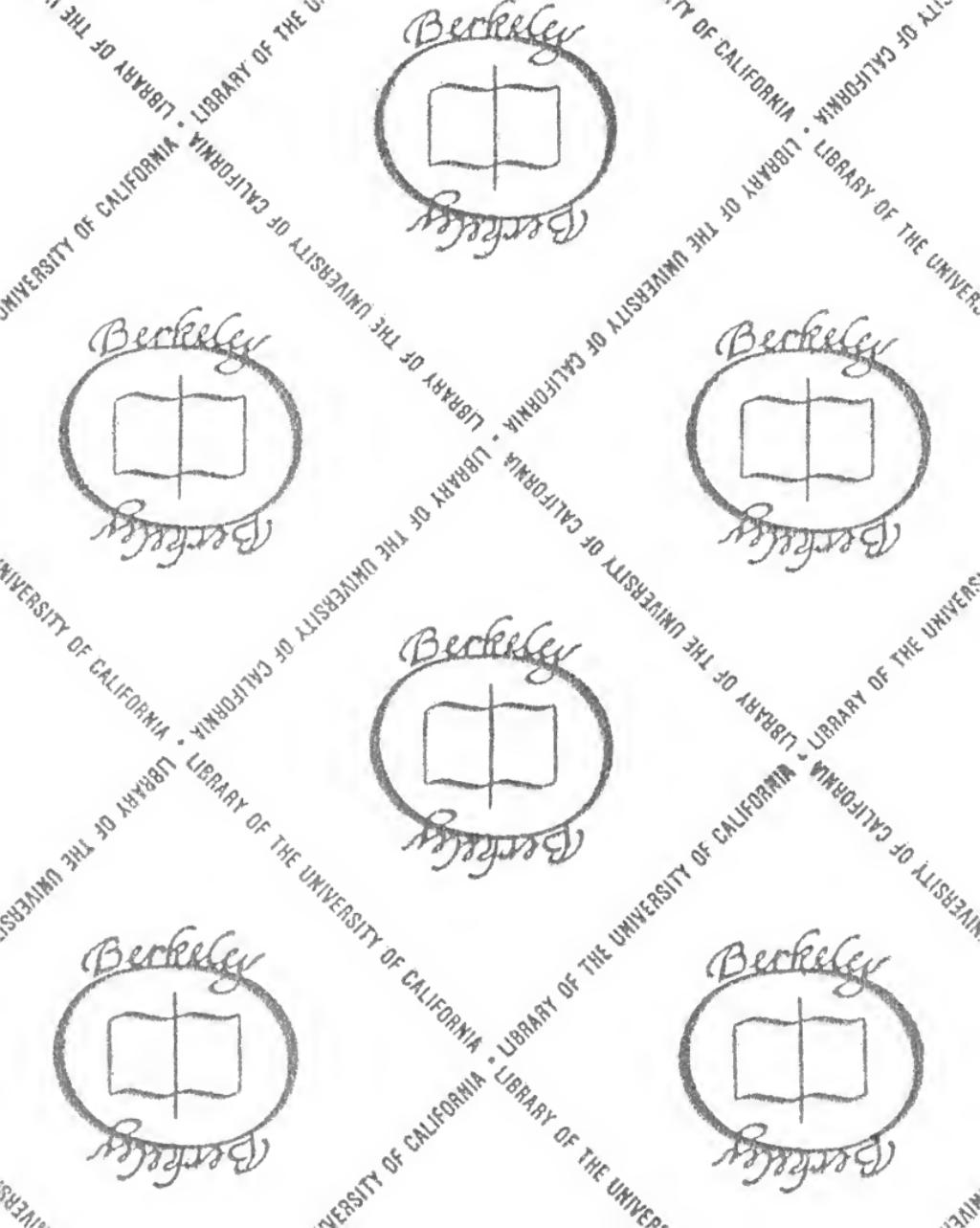


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FOREST AND GAME-LAW
TALES.

BY

HARRIET MARTINEAU.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE BISHOP'S FLOCK AND THE BISHOP'S HERD.
HEATHENDOM IN CHRISTENDOM.
FOUR YEARS AT MAUDE-CHAPEL FARM.

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PREFACE.

I HAVE already intimated that there is substantial truth at the foundation of all these Tales. But it is right to say further, that the most important part of the Tale, "Heathendom in Christendom," is strictly fact. I have given, with scarcely any alteration but of names, the narrative of a murder which took place thirty years ago, as contained in the published Report of the memorable trial for that murder, in April 1816.

H. M.

AMBLESIDE,

Dec. 8th, 1845.

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THE
BISHOP'S FLOCK AND THE BISHOP'S
HERD.

CHAPTER I.

FOREST WAYS.

FARMER RASBROOK was toiling in the heat of a September day, throwing his sheaves up into the harvest wain, when his daughter Polly, who had been binding in the same field, came running up to him, with a flush on her cheek and a laugh in her eye.

“ Father! ” whispered she, “ do you see yonder gleaner? ”

“ What ! gleaning before the shocks are carried ! Why, Pol, what are you about to let him glean ? Run to him, and warn him off ! Turn him out.”

“ So I will, father, if you will observe him while I do it.—Look now !—No, he turns his

back again. But just watch him while I speak to him, that's all."

"That's all! 'Tis much, I can tell you, to ask me to look off my work now we have got fine weather at last;—and for the sake of one who comes to glean before my corn is carried. Watch you! Not I!"

The farmer did, however, rest upon his fork, and follow his daughter with his eye as she tripped towards the gleaner. He chuckled when he saw what a mighty air of haughtiness she put on as she pointed to the gate, in ordering off the intruder.—But he did not know what to think when he saw the gleaner make magnificent bows in return, instead of sneaking away as gleaners usually did when warned off.

"Why, 'tis Asher making fun, I do believe," thought the farmer. "That boy and girl are the drollest children man ever had. They make me laugh every day of my life, when I am ever so much vexed.—It must be Asher, idle boy!—Why no! there's Asher as busy as any-body, bless the boy! How he does work!"

The farmer was obliged to chuckle again when he now saw Polly threatening the intruder with a rake which she caught up. The gleaner threw in her face the armful he had gleaned, and both

began to run. Polly drove her antagonist with the rake, making him take a course which would bring him near her father ; to which indeed the boy seemed to have no objection.

“ Whew !” whistled the farmer as he came up ; and he turned to his work again with affected diligence, urging on his men as if it were they who had rested on their forks while the sun was shining, and the sheaves were waiting. The gleaner meantime leaped the fence at a bound, carrying nothing with him.

“ I see, Pol,” said the farmer, as his breathless daughter came up, and looked meaningly in his face. “ The gipsies are early this season.”

“ But, father, did you ever see a gipsy so dark ? ”

“ Why no. But they can please themselves, you know, about that.”

And he winked, and chuckled as if he had said the wittiest thing in the world. When he had composed himself, he asked,

“ Did he tell you whereabouts the camp is ? ”

“ No. He told me nothing. He only inquired what sort of crops we had this year, and whether the deer had been mischievous.”

“ Rot the deer ! ” cried the farmer, striking his fork into the ground, with the passion he always showed when the deer and his fields were men-

tioned together. "To hear the brutes come on in the night, crack, crack, snap, snap, through the hedges, and know what mischief I shall see in the morning!"

"So I told him. That is, I said they had come over the hedges; and that we were plagued with them still, and should have little rest till the corn was all carried."

"Rot the deer!" cried the chafed farmer, wiping his brows. "I'll complain to the Bishop,—I will! I'll be off to Winchester, and complain to the Bishop."

"Well: next week, perhaps," said Polly. "We are too busy, this harvest week."

"And when the corn is all carried, child, what will be the use of complaining then? Why, child, you're a fool, I think."

"We'll see about all that next week," said Polly, decisively. "And now I'll go finish binding. They have just done there, you see. If we try for it, we shall have the field cleared by dark; and then, you know, the gleaners can come when they please."

"Ay! and we can begin on the five-acre field to-morrow," said her father.

Off she went; and presently she had set agoing the reaping song, before which the growth

of the last furrows of the field fell, rapidly and cheerily.

This was the harvest of 1723; and in those days, though every grown person in England had meat once a week, and not more than one in six had it less than twice a week—that is, on Sundays and one week-day,—the proportion was large of those who had it but little oftener. Polly had no meat to cook this night: and when the supper of porridge, and bread, cheese and beer was finished, she was going wearily to bed by starlight, when she heard her father's voice under the window calling her.—She put her head out:

“Well, father.”

“I say, Pol,—listen over there. Do you hear anything?”

“Not I. I'm so sleepy, I can't stop yawning.”

“Just come down. 'Tis worth listening to. Only it should have been every night through the summer.”

“Anything the gipsies are doing?” asked Polly, when she came forth, now wide awake.

“No; not the gipsies;—the keepers. What do you hear now?”

“A halloo over yonder, in the direction of the lodge; but it is a long way off.”

"That is the keeper hallooing. And we shall hear it now every night, about the time the deer go out to feed:—every night, I mean, as long as some little bird of the wood tells the keepers that my neighbours and I mean to complain to the Bishop."

"O ! he is calling the deer to feed, away from our fields. It is full late to begin, when they have got nearly all they can steal from us."

"That's it, you see, child. While our corn is in the field, they let the deer roam after what they like best: and now the autumn is coming on, they begin to try to keep them within bounds, with mast spread in the proper walks, and ash sprays to browze near the lodge. Ay ! that is all very well; but that halloo would not have been heard till after harvest complete, if some little bird had not perched, as I said, and told the keeper about my going to Winchester, to complain to the Bishop."

"And now," said Polly, yawning, "I suppose you will not want to light the fires about the five-acre field, if the deer are called elsewhere. I am sure I am glad of it, if other people are as sleepy as I am."

"Why, you are talking in your sleep, I think ; or else you're a fool, as I often tell you."

"Very often," Polly agreed.

"As if," said the farmer, "the brutes did not want training to the halloo! As if it did not take a fortnight to make them come up to the halloo! But we'll teach them. We'll help the keeper to make the brutes like their own walk best. Asher has got such stinking stuff to throw into the fires to-night that, if the smoke spreads abroad properly, there is no stag or hind that will endure to come within half a mile of the five-acre field."

"Pah! And how are we to go within half a mile of it?" exclaimed Polly. "We that have to work there all to-morrow!"

"See that when to-morrow comes. I must save my corn, now at the last. See about that to-morrow, child."

"Very well. I am sure I can see nothing more to-night."

"To bed with you, little fool. Now I think of it, I will have Asher go to bed, and light the fires myself. The boy worked hard. He shall go to bed."

Polly tried to listen for her brother's coming in, and going to bed in the little room next to hers. But she listened in vain for two minutes, and then was lost in sleep.

How long she had slept she knew not when she started up, rubbed her eyes, but could see nothing through the yet black night. She had been dreaming for a long time, she thought, that some gentry were hunting in the forest, as she often saw them do; and that the Squire and Mr. Bob would go on popping off their guns, without giving her time to get out of the way. Almost before she could recal this dream, she really heard shots, somewhere near the house.—After the second there was a pause; then a third. She now left her bed, and groped her way to the partition which divided her brother's room from hers. She knocked and called; but there was no answer. At last, she felt her way to the room. The bed was cold, and had evidently not been slept in.

Instead of being alarmed, as farmers' daughters in our day, living away from a forest, would be, Polly had a strong desire to follow Asher's example, and see what was doing abroad: but by the time she was beginning to dress, she heard voices under the windows, and a loud laugh from her father, which assured her that no family misfortune had happened. So, as soon as the farmer and Asher had come in, and bolted the kitchen door with the usual noise, she was asleep again.

She awoke at dawn : and when the sight of a tinge of pink in the sky, and the thought of the gipsy gleaner, the night fires and the shots in the darkness, all occurred to her at once, she was seized with a vehement desire for an early trip in the forest,—this being the only time she could command that day.

Forth she went, before any one else was awake, and a full hour before the cows would be thinking of her.—First she crossed the paddock, and then the five-acre field. There she looked about her.. The thick-standing corn was brown for the sickle ; and a finer crop Polly thought she had never seen.

“ And so it ought to be,” said she to herself, “ when it and the next field have cost us five pounds in fires and watching against the deer,—besides all the trouble, and its making my father so angry.—But where is the bad smell, I wonder. All is sweet enough here, I’m sure.”

Little jets of smoke were still rising from the blackened spots outside the hedge, where the fires had been kindled: but no less agreeable scent interfered with that of the sweetbriar which floated in the air as the first sunbeam touched the fences.

“ Hum ! I wonder which way they came,”

thought she, looking in the dewy grass for traces of the deer. “ My father said that now they had got to make our fields their haunt, they would be sure to come every night till the mast was ripe, and our crops carried. I will find their track before I go further.”

She soon found the track and something more. In an angle of the next pasture, which was yesterday grass and now mire, she saw a quantity of blood,—here sprinkled,—there in pools. This spectacle told her what to look for next: and she saw indeed, on examining the lower branches of the hedgerow trees, that they had been used as she had supposed. No doubt, deer had been hung upon them, when their throats were cut, to bleed.—Near at hand, she found the tracks of cart wheels, sunk so deep that there could be no doubt that, if the carcases of deer had been conveyed away that night, the load had not been trifling.

Having satisfied herself thus far, Polly went on, to learn further who were the poachers that had been so friendly to her father’s wheat-field.

She presently decided, by a glance at the turf, which direction to take. She plunged into the forest through a brake where there was no path, but where she walked as confidently as on a

beaten road. It seemed to be her delight to rouse and startle all living things as she went. If, in an open space, she found a herd of forest ponies grazing, she dispersed them in various directions by her clapping and halloo. If she found a mild-eyed heifer browsing alone, she fixed it with her eye, and actually attained once to stroking and patting its hide before it wheeled round and made off down a glade. The deer calves were too old now to be tempted to draw near and eat out of her steady hand, though she could offer them tempting young acorns : but she saw several of them from afar, as they were retiring with the hinds to the coverts for the day. They stood still among the golden ferns to gaze at her as she passed ; and then she stood still, in her turn ; and it was perhaps some seconds before any accidental rustle in the thicket would send them bounding into the recesses of the woodland, there to hide till night.

Then there were the ringdoves, at this season coming forth in a flock, and settling thick on a clump of trees. How could she help cooing till she caused a stir and flutter among them, and was welcomed as one of their company ? And next, she came upon the handsome pheasant, looking so glossy in the morning sun as he fed

upon the berries of the brake till her approach made him whirr away.—Then the leveret slunk across her path ; and the squirrel attracted her eye ; and the thrush flew out of the holly ; and the rook was overhead, winging forth to the downs till night should bring him back to his roost in the woodland : and one raven there was, following his directly opposite way of life. He came from the cliffs of the Isle of Wight,—a mere morning flight,—to see what carrion any contention in the forest had provided for him. Then there was the honey bee, hovering and settling wherever a patch of heather lay open to the sun.

Polly went on but slowly, with all these diversions occurring in her path. And when the warmth of a stream of sunshine reminded her of the harvest field, and that she ought to make haste, it perversely happened that a reedy pool lay dark in the shadow on her left hand, with a single pencil of light just touching it from an opening in the copse : and this awakening touch was so surprising to the wild-fowl on the brink that they were ducking and splashing as if a new day were a totally new experience to them.—What more might have occurred to delay Polly there is no saying ; but she now became aware that what she sought was near at hand. A distant laugh

and a slender column of smoke within view revealed the neighbourhood of gipsies.

She was now entering upon one of the most beautiful of forest views,—a lawn, with only here and there a shrub or clump dropped upon it, while woody promontories stretched boldly forth into it, their dark oaks and darker hollies and box, with here and there a detached yew, contrasting strongly with the bright dewy green of the open ground. From behind one of these dark promontories rose the blue smoke which directed Polly's course.

She never thought of hesitating, though she knew nothing of the numbers she was about to encounter. If it was true, as her father declared, that she could fix a forest bull with her eye, and daunt the squire's friends, if she happened to encounter them, in the early morning, reeling home after a carouse, she had enough of the gipsy in her to feel herself safe among gipsies: or indeed anywhere; for it is the cast of mind, or training of character, which gives this command over circumstances, much more than the fact of race. In this case too, as was pretty well known to all parties,—government, magistrates, bishop, country-people and poachers,—there was no gipsy blood involved in the matter at all.

Instead of going round the promontory, Polly thought she would cross it, and so look down upon the camp before she was herself perceived. She did so ; and great was her surprise when she saw what a company was collected. Instead of two or three wagontilts, and a single fire, she looked down upon a sleeping company of above a hundred men, women, and children. Of these last there were very few ; only half a dozen boys, for convenience,—for scouts, messengers, fetchers and carriers. These boys were now on foot, looking and wandering about ; while two or three tall, awkward-looking women were about the fires, amusing themselves at intervals with examining the rifles, which lay one beside each sleeper, while more arms might be seen laid away from the dew, under the sailcloths which sheltered the heads of the sleepers.

Polly skipped down from the woody slope, in order to hold her discourse with the women before the rest of the company should awake. She was for a moment startled at her reception by the one she accosted, who moved certainly with nothing of gipsy grace. She was greeted with a low bow.

“ Let me see if I know you,” said the quick-witted girl. “ Of all the gentlemen of my small acquaintance, let me see if you be one.”

Her gaze was so earnest and sincere, that the object of it burst out a laughing. That laugh told all.

“Mr. Bob!” cried Polly. “O! Mr. Bob!”

“What’s the matter?” cried he.

“You know very well. I am sorry to see you here.”

“That is unkind of you, Miss Polly. Nobody relishes the forest better than you do, on a sweet September morning: and you should not wish any friend of yours to be cooped up in London, studying law. Ah! if you knew what it was to study law in London, you would be ready enough to run down into the country, now and then, for the frolic of breaking that same law.”

“Then I would go somewhere else, Mr. Bob, and not close upon my own home.”

“Why, that’s the fun of it. There is my good father sending word to the Bishop where the Waltham Blacks are supposed to be: and there is my dear mother writing me letter after letter full of the horrors of the Waltham Blacks; and when I show myself among the lawyers in town, the morning after such a trip as this, they ask me whether I think of going into Hampshire, and how I conceive the new Act will work in putting down the Waltham Blacks:—and to feel how much wiser I

am than all of them together about the Waltham Blacks!—what fun like it could I find anywhere else?"

"But—Mr. Bob—don't go too far, that's all."

"I am going a good way to-day," said he. "The Bishop is to entertain a great party of clergy on Thursday; and we are off to-day, two or three of us, to Winchester, to leave at the Bishop's the finest buck we shot last night,—just as he was about to sup in your father's field, by the way. We shall deliver him at the Palace gate, with the best compliments of the Waltham Blacks to the bishop, and we hope he will enjoy his own. Do you see that fellow,—the one asleep beside the wine-hamper,—next the snorer? Well,—he is in luck to be in the church, for this frolic. He is to be at the Bishop's dinner, by favour of an innocent chaplain. He will tell us how the venison turns out, and what they all say of the Waltham Blacks.—He is a daring fellow, that. He is almost as well known in these parts as I am; and yet, you see, he is not pestered as I am with cap and petticoats.—Anywhere else, it would be disguise enough to leave off my periwig, and stain my face. But here, the whole gentry were busy for so many years in finding out whether I was most like my father or my mother, that they know every feature

of my poor face.—Now, what are you laughing at, Miss Polly ?”

“ At what you are thinking of.”

“ And what am I thinking of ?”

“ Of your being pulled so cruelly two ways about your frolics. If you took the north road from London, as you know a certain person does when the deer are out of season, you might have a chance to get a name all over England as the Handsome Highwayman : while now, to set against the fun of curtseying to your father as he rides by, and leaving the bishop’s own venison at his own door, you have to smother up yourself in woman’s clothes, and look so awkward ! How I did laugh as I watched you from above there, to see how awkward you were !”

“ You did !—you . . . ”

“ Come now, no nonsense !” said Polly. “ I could beat you at a run, you know, before you could get on a dozen steps : and I have no time for nonsense. I want to know how much you did last night,—and whether you come our way again to-night ; and how many you are, this time ; and what I am to say and do, if the constables come, or the soldiers :—for some say the soldiers are to be brought down.”

“ We are a little above a hundred : but in two

days, we shall be only a score or so. All belonging to these parts that are supposed to be out harvesting must be at home by Sunday; and we Londoners must show ourselves there by the middle of the week."

"And will that time serve your turn?"

"Why yes,—though another week would have been very well. Your neighbours will have a pretty pocketful of harvest earnings to show. We sent off a rare cartload of venison to town this morning, and promised another to-morrow. But this Black Act is a plaguy check upon us. We have to take such care of your country-people, who have not wit to take care of themselves."

"O dear!" said Polly, disappointed. "I thought you said the business would go on faster than ever."

"So I did; and that is true. Many sprightly young fellows join, and help the fun the more, the more danger there is in it. And, you see, our bands are larger and better armed, of course. But we can't do without a good many natives, to show us the way, and find the haunts of the deer, and carry us wide of the keepers and such nuisances. We can't do without these fellows; and they would run themselves into worse scrapes without us, I do believe; for neither law nor gospel can keep

them off the track of the deer, when they have once grown fond of the scent. You might as well preach law and gospel to the bishop's hounds. But, do what we will, it is desperate work for them, since the Act passed. That is a spirited little fellow, that brother of yours, Miss Polly, that I saw last night."

"He ought to have been in his bed."

"I wish he had: and I would give you a word of advice, if I did not fear it was too late now. I fear what he saw last night did the business. He has tasted sport now."

"And why not? You praise sport, and so does everybody."

"Yes; but it is rather serious work now introducing a boy into it,—since that infernal Act. If we saw a fine gay fellow hanged, it would spoil the flavour of our sport somewhat."

"Why, yes, I think so. But before that day comes, people will choose rather to sleep in their beds, I suppose."

"No, they will not. Every one of yonder company that put a hand to the business last night, might be hanged under the new Act, if the offence could be proved upon them; and . . ."

"Hanged!" exclaimed Polly, white with horror.

Mr. Bob burst out a laughing again,—with how

much sincerity Polly could not assure herself. But he joked a little while, and then asked her if she supposed the law could do any harm to such a multitude as the Waltham Blacks: and when she looked at the large gang here collected, and thought how almost everybody she knew that lived near the forest was accustomed to play pranks with the deer, she dismissed her momentary panic, and said that so great a number of people must be safe from any severe punishment. It would take all Winchester to imprison the Waltham Blacks; and unless all were taken, they would permit no harm to happen to one or a few.—Mr. Bob rallied her about this terrible law having moved her a little for a moment: on which she retorted that it had moved him and his companions first. Instead of the blackened faces of the last season, they appeared now in a dark shade of gipsy brown.

“Very true!” Mr. Bob replied. “It is safer, in more ways than one. But you don’t know in how many shapes you may see me yet, before the season is over.—Where now, Miss Polly?”

“Home,” said she, seeing that some of the band were waking up. “It is a busy day at home. And I came partly to thank your company for saving our corn. But I did not think to meet Mr. Bob here.”

"I will go part of the way with you.—And O ! Miss Polly, will you do me a favour ? Will you just go round by my father's, and deliver some message that we can invent,—that I may see my mother in a sly way ? She will be gathering her herbs and things in the garden by that time." And he looked at his watch,—a singularly handsome watch for a gawky gipsy woman to acknowledge. "Ah ! yes,—my mother will just be down ; and I will look through the garden wicket while you talk with her."

Polly fell in with this most merrily. She soon devised some business for the occasion. One of the good lady's medicinal possets required a weed which was common enough, but which must be gathered with the dew on, in the night of new moon. The last night had been that of new moon ; and the dew was still heavy on the weed in shaded places. So Polly plucked some handfuls of it ; and to make it look the more perfect, dipped it afresh in the nearest stream before ringing at the squire's gate. Mr. Bob lounged on, a few yards behind her, stopping at the garden wicket.

"Don't be afraid of the gipsy, my dear," said the groom to her, as she cast a glance behind her on entering the gate. "My master knows how

to deal with them sort of people, according to the vigour of the law . . .”

“The rigour of the law,” said the footman, who was passing through the yard.

“Well, 'tis the same thing;—it all means, Miss Polly, that the gipsy woman shan't hurt you. And you will find my mistress in the kitchen garden; and she'll be glad to have you help her with the snails.”

“When shall I get home?” thought Polly.
“But I must not disappoint Mr. Bob, after his helping to save our corn.”

CHAPTER II.

REMEDIES PREPARING.

"You have brought something for me, I see, child," said Mrs. Weyford, as Polly approached, curtseying. "Ah! good,—very good! Now carry them to Mrs. Betty, and tell her to put them in a brown jar on the shelf of my closet, and cover them up, that the dew may not dry off them before I come in.—Do that, my dear, and then I will speak to you."

As Polly returned, she managed to discover that the snails were uncommonly plentiful upon some espaliers near the wicket: and thither came the good lady, tapping along the hard pebbled walk in her high-heeled shoes. Polly began collecting snails with great ostentation of haste, intimating that she was wanted at home.

"I won't detain you, child. But you must carry a message from me to your father. Tell him there is an alarm of the Waltham Blacks coming down upon the forest,—just as bad as last season."

"Why," said Polly, innocently, "I heard say that the squire said there was law against the Blacks now."

"So there is: and the squire means that the wretches shall have a pretty strong taste of the law too. What I want you to tell your father is . . . Begone there! Don't come about these premises, or . . ."

Polly looked about her, as if scared.

"Don't be frightened, child. There is a gipsy woman looking in at the gate. Really, we are so infested with vagabonds . . . Begone, I say!—There she is again! I shall tell Will to look well after the fowls," she whispered.

"Perhaps the squire had better send the gipsies away," said Polly. "My father always wishes he would."

"So do I, my dear: but, I don't know how it is, he is tender-hearted with that sort of people, and they always wheedle him over in the end."

"Perhaps it will be so about the Blacks."

"No: that is a very different affair,—the meddling with deer in the forest. And disguised too!"

"Ah! that is the worst of it," said Polly. "Somebody said that besides blacking their faces, they dress in all manner of strange ways:—some

like devils, with tails ; and one like a donkey going about on its hind legs ; and some . . . ”

“ Some dressed as women, we hear,” said the lady. “ Horrid wretches !”

“ That is horrid !” cried Polly. “ People that shoot deer in the dark to dress like women !”

“ Well ; there will soon be an end of that, as I want you to tell your father. People are coming from London to catch the Blacks ; and all that are caught will be hanged. We are to send word to town, as soon as the wretches are known to be out ; and then a sufficient force will be sent to vindicate the law.”

“ How many Waltham Blacks are there, I wonder,” said Polly. “ And where do they come from ?”

“ Ah ! ” said the lady, “ that is the worst part of it. It makes one tremble to think who they may be. We are told that they certainly cannot be strangers,—or very few of them,—they show such knowledge of the forest ways, and the retreats of the deer. I declare I never speak a word to a neighbour now without wondering whether his face has ever been blacked.—There is that gipsy peeping in again ! I must send Will after her, I declare.”

“ I will tell Will, madam. I must be going now.”

" Well,—tell your father that when the people from London come, the squire will want some trusty neighbours to serve as guides in the forest. No man knows the forest better than your father ; and I dare say he will be willing to help us."

" I will tell him, madam ; and if our harvest is all done "

" O ! no fear of that ! It will take two days to send for the people, and get them down, after we have certain news that the Blacks are here.— We expect some information about this additional force from Mr. Isherwood, this evening. He is to come home to-night. And indeed I shall be glad when he is home ;—the roads are in such a state!"

" And yet there has not been much rain lately," observed Polly.

" O ! I don't mean that, child. Mr. Isherwood comes on horseback ; and a little mire, more or less, would not signify. I mean about the highwaymen. They say it is a chance whether any one passes at present without meeting the gang. We begged him to come round by Southampton. But he laughed, and said he never rides with anything that he values about him, and that he is not aware that he has any personal enemies."

"Then he has nothing to do with the deer," observed Polly.

"Very true, child. He is not a magistrate yet: but we hope he soon will be. He is the very man for a magistrate,—unless he should prove a little too easy and mild."

"He will have enemies soon enough then," said Polly. "Heaven guard him from the Blacks!—And now I will send Mr. Will after that gipsy woman,—shall I, madam?"

"Yes,—impudent creature, to linger about in this way! We must have their camp looked out, and rooted up: and if the squire won't do it, I will speak to Mr. Isherwood to get another magistrate to be more firm.—Thank you, child. I have all I want now but the earthworms: and the gardener has orders about them. All these snails will be no more than we need; for Rose Naylor is turning as consumptive as her poor cousin; and the sooner she begins with her regimen the better. Good morning, child: and wish your father a merry harvest home from us."

When Mr. Will bustled out after the gipsy woman, she was not in sight. Up and down the road she was looked for in vain. She joined Polly, however, from a gap in the hedge, about half way between the squire's and the farm.

"O! Mr. Bob," said Polly, "it is all going wrong, you see, about the law. Do get back to London, and make all those people of yours let the deer alone.—You heard what Mrs. Weyford said?"

"Every word of it. And I think it is extremely consoling. You see it is not known yet that the Blacks are out; and when it is, we have still two days' grace. We must make the most of our time; and then the watch, or soldiers, or whatever these Londoners may be, may beat the forest as they like, and find any game but what they are looking for. By the way, we must make out what this new force is to be.—I see it!" he exclaimed, after musing a moment.—"And now, Miss Polly, you to your harvest work, and I to Winchester! But, before you go, tell me,—does not my mother grow handsomer and handsomer?"

"She is a comely lady indeed," replied Polly.
"And always kindly spoken."

"Bless her open heart! She would make a curious dispenser of the laws, for all the severe things she dutifully says against offenders. I admire her finding fault with my father for his lenity with gipsies and such people;—she who would never get beyond inflicting a sermon, if she were on the bench!"

"Don't be vexed, father," said Polly, laying her hand somewhat authoritatively on farmer Rasbrook's shoulder. "I am late; but I have been out to some purpose."

"And suppose everybody in the field did the same, and said the same," grumbled the farmer, "what would become of my reaping?"

"That will never happen, father, any more than all your people will be out with you, loading a cart in the middle of the night.—But O! father, how could you let Asher see"

"I did bid him go to bed; but somehow, at the time we wanted all the hands we could get; and he is such a handy one!"

"And now, father, see if he ever settles,—see if he is ever satisfied with fieldwork again!"

"Go you to your fieldwork, and don't talk to me," said the uneasy farmer.

He determined, however, to see Asher in bed this night before he went forth to his poaching appointment.

This business he was obliged, before the time came, to depute to his daughter. A mysterious message summoned him forth as soon as the day's labour was over, and before he had time to sup. Polly and Asher stood out at the door in the starlight, about the time when they might expect to hear the keeper's halloo to the deer. Asher

told her, in eager whispers, the whole story of the preceding night, but was more discreet than she liked about the plan for this night's expedition. He did not conceal that another cart-load was to be sent to London : but he would not tell where the meeting was to be ; nor did it appear whether he knew that any lawyer from town was of the company, or indeed who any of his comrades had been.

Polly spoke seriously to him of the severity of the new law, and of the determination to enforce it. At first, he laughed at the idea of any law reaching such a body as he now knew the Waltham Blacks to be. But his sister's earnest voice, breathing cautiously at his ear in the dim starlight, wrought upon him by degrees, and he had become grave, when the distant halloo was heard, bringing tidings that the deer were coming forth to feed. It is probable that the image thus conjured up filled and transported the boy's mind, to the exclusion of everything else ; for, when Polly stepped back to the door from leaning over the pales to listen, he was gone. She called and sought him in vain. She lay down at last with some experience of what it was to be without a light heart ; and the truth was,—ashamed as she would have been to have it known,—she shed a few tears in the dark.

CHAPTER III.

A WALTHAM SQUIRE.

MR. ISHERWOOD was riding homewards this evening,—very leisurely, for he had abundant time to reach his house before supper,—when he fell into a mood of thought which made his groom at length cough repeatedly, and at last take the liberty of observing that there were evil reports abroad about the road, and that there was not moon enough yet to be of any use.

“No fear, John! There is nothing to be had from either of us, if they stopped us to search. And I trust we have left such doings behind us.”

To please John, however, he put his horse to a trot. He would rather have continued to observe at full leisure the charms of a soft and quiet autumn evening; but he could continue his subject of thought.

“It is unreasonable,” was his meditation, “to look for perfection in any home that a man can make for himself. When I came down here to

live, disgusted with the depravity which is the fashion of the time in London, I did find it provoking to have my hours of retreat and study broken in upon by people who can talk of nothing but their dogs and horses, and who cannot understand how a man may like to be alone with his books and in his rides. And our country dinners are almost as bad as the raking frolics one cannot get out of the way of in town. I almost doubted whether I had done wisely in settling myself here ; but all doubts of the kind vanish on every such return as this. How could I ever be ruffled by the interruption and the vexation of an hour, when these everlasting woods wave daily over my head ! The faces of the stupid and the frivolous pass before me like a flitting dream, while day and night, summer and winter, never cease, and are ever young features of that calm, loving, gazing face of Nature which should inspire a tranquillity and joy not to be affected by transient irritations.

“The pond to-night, reflecting the stars, and the green walk, just disclosed by them ! and to-morrow, the nut coppice, and the beds of autumn flowers ! These with time, and a book in hand,—and, I trust, my neighbours not aware till the day after of my return,—what a home these

make ! And if I do not to-morrow work out the principle at least of the doctrine I promised . . . John, what is the matter here ? Is this an accident on the road ?—an overturn ? ”

“ It looks like it, Sir. There seems to be a crowd collected.” He here rode up close to his master, and whispered,—“ But, Sir, that horseman that rode by us so close, just now, had crape on his face. I’m afraid it is the Waltham Blacks way-laying you, Sir.”

“ Ha ! Then courage, John, and ride on ! They will not hurt you. And resistance is impossible. We can hardly be the people they want ; but yet, it is not likely they should let us go forward.”

In another moment, both the horses fell, and their riders were pulled off by many hands before they could make an effort to recover themselves. John disappeared from his master’s view ; but his rational master had little fear that a mere groom would suffer further than from the fright.

“ A sweat ! A sweat ! ” cried two or three voices.

“ So that disgusting prank has found its way from town to this quiet country,” said Mr. Isherwood, with a cool contempt which it was rare for a party of the fashionable tormentors of that day to encounter.

" You will oblige us with it, however," said one, who wore a crape over his face, as did most of the crowd. As nothing could be seen of the faces of the others, it was to be supposed that they were in some way darkened.

" No, I shall not oblige you," said Mr. Isherwood. " I am not disposed to dance to-night."

By this time a circle was formed round the prisoner; and every man of the number pointed his sword, or other sharp weapon, at him.

" Then tell us without compulsion, whatever we ask," said one, who appeared to be the leader. " We must have your news, or you must have our compulsion."

" What is it that you want to know ? "

" Who are we that you have the honour to be parleying with ? "

" The Waltham Blacks, I suppose,—reserving my opinion as to the honour."

" What information do you bring to the magistrates of this neighbourhood of the plans of justice in regard to the Waltham Blacks ? "

" I decline answering that question."

" Then you must sweat for it."

" No, I will not do that either,—in your sense of the word."

And Mr. Isherwood folded his arms, and stood in the circle, resolved to fall sooner than dance.

The intention was, as all acquainted with the manners of those times are aware, to prick him with the points of swords whichever way he turned, so as to make him incessantly change his place,—or, as the tormentors termed it, dance—till he was sufficiently heated and exhausted to be glad of release on any terms. In London, on meeting a random party, seeking fun in the streets, Mr. Isherwood would have yielded at once, and made diversion for them with all speed, as the quickest way of getting out of their hands. But this was evidently a more serious matter. He was way-laid as the bearer of tidings; and this plot was not for sport, but for the defeating of justice. He therefore declined with himself the ludicrous view of the affair, and resolved to act with the firmness becoming its real gravity.

He neither spoke nor moved, while his captors danced round him, as he would not dance to them. Under the long succession of pricks from their swords, knives or sickles, their victim at last tottered from faintness. The leader then exclaimed

“There is no fun in this, nor any use. Let him go.”

"Tip him with fire," said a brutal voice. "I warrant that will make him speak."

"No," cried the leader. "He has proved himself staunch. And we can secure our own purposes by preventing any magistrate getting access to him till we have finished our sport.—Come, Squire Isherwood, let me help you to your horse. We must blockade you for a day or two at home; but you are known to be happiest when alone with your books."

"You seem well informed about me and my affairs, whoever you may be. If you have learned such a secret as that I have messages to the magistrates, perhaps you may know some other things that are in my mind,—such as the pity I feel for you; and my strong indignation that such men as you,—for it is plain that you are a man of education, and of London habits,—should beguile my simple neighbours into capital crimes."

"Come,—lean on my shoulder, and let my people put you on your horse."

"Stand off!" said Mr. Isherwood. "My horse shall sooner drag me in the road than I will owe support to any of your company. One word more with you, Mr. Leader. I can admire brave sport as much as any man: but I see no bravery in your practice of drawing numbers into your scrape, that

you may evade punishment by dint of numbers. When the devil catches your hindmost, I would rather be the poor fellow swinging on the gallows than you who brought him here."

"I won't hear this, Sir . . . I . . . "

"Yes, you will. It has entered your ear, and nothing can put it out again. So, I have done."

The leader kept out of the rider's way; but he hovered around him, as looking to his safety. It was he who rang at Mr. Isherwood's gate:—it was he who desired the pale housekeeper to see if her master was wounded, and to take good care of him: and it was he who swore that no harm should happen to any living creature on the premises, if no one would attempt to leave them till the guard were withdrawn.

John was unhurt, though still trembling with fright. When he had put up his horses, he gave his best help to bolt and bar doors and shutters, and then became the glory of the servants' hall,—making the very most of a sufficiently wonderful story.

The housekeeper could not possibly report her master's wounds to be otherwise than very slight; so she made a marvel of their number.—As for her master, the marvel to him was what she could have done to them to make them smart so. But,

as he always believed what people said, unless there was strong reason to the contrary, he put faith in her assurance that this smarting was for his good ; though his own natural opinion would have been that sleep would have been better. While unable to sleep, and awaiting the time for his next move, many thoughts, some bitter, some sad, some hopeful and calming, passed through his mind.

“ May Heaven preserve me,” thought he, “ from the infidelity of despair about the depravity of the age ! I would not deny it. I will never deny it ; but rather search out its causes, and therein find a sure prophecy of its end :—not its extinction, but its mutation into some other, and I trust, less fearful form.—It is truly enough to sink any heart to meet the monkey face that society now presents at every turn. The foppery of London, now spread downwards through every rank, and not, like social vices in general, passing away as it passes down, so as to afford good hope that it will go out at the lower end ;—this foppery, extinguishing the manhood of noblemen, and poisoning the purity of the tradesman’s home, sickens the soul. And there follows on it the ruin of women. It is but a mask of womanhood that I see, from the patched and painted lady of quality to her dis-

gusting copy,—the once fresh and gay country girl, become in a month the snuff-taking, fur-belowed associate of pranking footmen.—Then there is the diseased appetite for illegality,—our very lawyers and clergymen spending their wits and precious hours in feats of upsetting coaches and sweating foot passengers:—our gentry amusing themselves with highway robbery, and with any wanton injury to their neighbours' peace that can be devised. Of all fashions, this is the most sure to spread. Besides its charms as a fashion, it falls in with the desires of sinners and the needs of the needy; so that it is no wonder if robbery and violence overspread the land.—And then comes in the cruelty of sanguinary laws. When this fashion of illegality has passed the point of amusing those whose first need in life is a laugh,—when lower classes have become involved in it as their business and sole sport,—when it alarms the journeys of the comfortable classes, and strips their orchards, and extirpates their deer, and fells their old oaks, and hints at abduction of their daughters,—then ensues the blind fury of hate and terror which creates monstrous laws. A stringent legality is sought to be established in a moment; and, as the convenience of the law-making class cannot wait, the sanction of terror is called in, and laws are

made cruel, to compensate for their having been ineffectual.

"But the object fails. People who have been habituated to think illegality no crime, are pretty sure to feel its penalties either sheer tyranny or no punishment at all. So, when a cartload of victims passes to the gallows, there is savage rebellion in the hearts of witnesses who go and act it out in new offences; or the gay culprit bows to the ladies all the way to Tyburn, making at every step admirers of his levity and aspirants to his fate. Should one despair, amidst a society like this? If the causes of these mischiefs were permanent, yes:—if not, no! And it seems to me that all this is childishness:—gigantic childishness, certainly;—the childishness of hell, which would better suit the scenery it lives in if our ponds were fire,—our forest-trees branching coal,—our sky adamant,—our dew-drops sulphur. But we have yet cool waters, and green glades, and blue depths of space to gaze into; and therefore I look upon this social state as one of foolish and froward childishness, likely soon to pass into some lesser petulance.—Moreover, its causes seem apparent to those who look for them. Perhaps it is true of all the great blessings given by God to man, that they are made subject to suspension,—

in order, not only that they may be duly valued, and their Giver recognised, but that their own worth may be veritably renewed,—their actual life replenished. We are accustomed to perceive and say this about most of our circumstances and endowments; and may it not be true of that unutterable and inestimable good, Routine, as well as of others? Routine is our celestial law,—the one essential condition of the integrity of our mortal state. But we cannot, like the heavenly bodies, have it pure; and therefore do we not make music in our courses, and therefore must we, now and then, run into a sort of chaos. This lapse, indeed, almost seems to be periodical,—a sort of consequence of intervals of comparative order. During a war, for instance, the scene of which is abroad, our people live with regularity, from being compelled to stay within the island. It becomes a matter of course to dwell at home, and almost a grievance if business or health compels a journey. Some narrow-mindedness accrues; but with it such a train of blessings as may go far to counterbalance the evils of war. Under this fixity, life and Providence do their work well; and their revelations pass before the eye and into the soul of the growing mortal, as the constellations of the sky before the gaze of the steadfast observer. If

it is good for men to be earnest, intent and efficient in their work of life, by this way must it come.—But peace ensues ; the continent is open. Anxious parents become aware of the limitations of dwellers at home ; and they forthwith carry their children hither and thither, catching at advantages here and there, and sacrificing the consummate advantage of a fixed home, steady objects, and firm habits. In deduction from the benefits of somewhat enlarged knowledge, some superior comprehensiveness of view, and amount of accomplishment, the unhappy wanderers lose what can never be regained ;—the natural health of home,—intentness of mind, earnestness of soul, devotion to steady aims, and depth of insight into life and its guidance. Life becomes to them a show-box, and its most serious events, mere scenes. For them, there is no real work, no genuine repose.—So it is with restless seekers after health of body, who have left but one thing untried till they become unable to try it,—the medicinal influence of home,—home from which no wish or thought strays, and where alone can objects be pursued to the entire occupation of the faculties which elsewhere are unbalanced, or corrode the frame.—Thus it is when reforms in religion break up old faiths, and souls are made restless by those worst of doubts

which have eternal, though selfish, fears attached to them.

"In all these cases, and many more, the individuals appear to lose irretrievably by the disruption of Routine,—the breaking up of that fixedness to which men appear to be benignantly made as naturally prone as to nightly sleep: and heavy is the cost, whatever may be the need and the gain.—And it appears to me that of this nature is the present disorder of our social state. Reformations, revolutions, and foreign wars have brought on crises of scepticism, of political doubt and consequent profligacy, and of wandering disorder, which is like the suspension of Routine in the life and mind of individuals. As to individuals, their privilege of custom can never be restored, so I fear can the blessing of social order never be imparted to this generation of my countrymen. But it would be ignorant and faithless to conclude that it is therefore lost to the world or to this island. For my life perhaps, I may be compelled to see men taken to the gallows in droves for doing what the law-makers did openly before the Black Act was passed. For my life I may be doomed to see gentlemen and their footmen fops and gamblers in town, and mere sportsmen and sots in the country;—and women sunk in coquetry,

gadding and frivolity; tradesmen turning foot-pads, and farmers poachers; while the cruelty of the law makes all law a hate and a mockery. But Man's need and love of Routine,—his natural craving for that indispensable blessing,—are a security that, sooner or later, men will again put their hearts and minds into their business, sleep at night, keep their hands from their neighbours' throats and goods, see that law is every wise man's friend, and take care that no perversion or exasperation of it shall disgust men most with that which they most need.—There ought to be more comfort in this assurance than in sleep: yet I should have relished a nap, to fit me for my enterprise;—a feat more strange to me than any highway-prank to such a youth as the leader of this band of Blacks to-night.—I wonder who he is:—no forester he;—rather some London scapegrace, I fancy. I almost thought I had somewhere heard his voice: but that is what every victim says of every highwayman, in these days, when foot-pads are our men of fashion.”

Precisely at the appointed hour, he heard the housekeeper's tap at his dressing-room door. He was soon dressed, and wrapt in a dark cloak.

“I do not like your going, Sir,” said the housekeeper. “They say the Blacks keep so close a

watch, when they surround a house, that I am sadly afraid you will fall into their hands."

"I do not like it at all, I assure you," replied her master. "There is nothing pleasant in it; but I must go.—Now, remember, every person in the house is to believe that I keep my room. If you cannot avoid sending to me, direct your message to Squire Weyford. A day or two will set us all free. Hold your secret and the house till then."

"I will, Sir: but, Sir, they will hear you in the bushes, and fire. And if they catch you, they will treat you worse than they did last night."

"We cannot help that; so not another word!—How many steps are there to these cellar-stairs? I cannot afford a fall to-night. I am as tottering as an old man.—Now, hold your tongue, Mrs. Wilson, and put me through this door;—or hole, as I should call it. If I do not come back in ten minutes, secure it, and go to-bed."

The door was a mere grating to let in light and air to the cellar. Mr. Isherwood crept through it with no little pain and difficulty, and with some amusement at the same thought that distressed Mrs. Wilson extremely,—that he should leave his own house in such a manner.

He emerged behind some shrubs; and there

he lay a few minutes, to recover breath and listen. To judge by the variety of voices, and the laughter here and there, the Blacks were in considerable numbers about the house. It happened fortunately that they had a lantern, which went round as they wanted to light their pipes. By means of such a transaction, he saw how his foes were placed,—one at each window and door, and others in groups on the lawn. When the lantern had travelled to the other side of the house, he lost no time, but crawled among the shrubs, touching them as little as possible, and, when clear of them, creeping along the lawn, between two of the groups of watchers. He so nearly hit one that a growling voice, suddenly saying something about the squire, seemed speaking into his very ear; and he wondered how he had missed grasping his enemy's foot or coat. He rolled over, paused a minute, and then continued. After twenty yards more of this crawling, he rose to his feet, and stole on cautiously till he came to the green walk, where he knew he was secure. From thence, his garden key let him into the paddock; and then he locked the gate, and pocketed the key with great satisfaction.

He was so stiff with his many little wounds that he was glad to reach the Weyfords' house.

He employed his utmost skill to rouse some one, without causing a noisy alarm. The Squire was the most difficult person in the world to wake; but his lady had a head full of anxious thoughts, which allowed her but little sleep this night. She and the butler, by joining their wits, soon discovered who was the gentle applicant outside. Mr. Isherwood was presently admitted; and, as soon as the squire could be roused, his news was told, and he was at liberty to go to sleep,—which he forthwith did.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO WALTHAM SQUIRES.

MR. ISHERWOOD slept long; and when he awoke, was not permitted to leave his room till dark, when the shutters were closed, and he was safe from observation from without.

The squire was rather restless this evening. He had the resolution, supported as he was by his lady, to take no more wine than was necessary, as he said, to give him his right head;—an effect recognised only by himself, for to every one else he appeared to be always wearing a very wrong head. This was to be an important night, unless the Blacks should have satisfied themselves with the game they had taken, and have dispersed before the force brought against them could close in upon them.

“Dispersed, Sir!” said the squire to his guest, “Do you think they ’ll be off while a hind or a calf remains? They ’ve stripped us, Sir,—stripped us. They ’ve left us nothing. They ’ve sent off hun-

dreds of cart loads, Sir. Their carts are all the way from this to London,—all bursting full of our venison, and birds, and all sorts of things.”

His wife and his guest were too familiar with his style of computation to think it necessary to question or qualify his statement about the carts.

“Is it possible,” asked Mr. Isherwood, “that neither your servants, nor the keepers, nor the paid watchers have ever recognised one of these poachers?”

“Never, Sir, never. How should they? Why, Sir, their faces are blacked as black as night, so that when our people look as close into their faces as a lady’s-maid into a looking-glass, they can’t see a feature, Sir,—can’t tell the chin from the eyes, Sir.”

“In that case,” observed Mr. Isherwood, “my method would be to take the fellow, and have his face washed.”

“Take him, Sir! why, you couldn’t. Should not we have taken them all long ago, if they were to be had? But there is no getting within shot of them. Nobody has ever been able to get within a mile of them. I have tried hundreds of times, and I could never hit one of them.”

Mr. Isherwood smiled.

“Ay! Sir, you may laugh; but it is no laughing

matter to a magistrate, Sir, to see the deer brought to nothing in the forest. It is no laughing matter to know that there are thousands of fellows with black faces all round your house, popping away, night and morning, and all times, at the deer and the birds, and ready to pop at you, if you should put your head out of cover."

"Indeed, I agree with you. It is no laughing matter, but a very serious one."

"Then, what I ask, Sir, is,—what I asked the bishop, last week,—why are not they all hanged? That is what I want to know."

"And what did the bishop say?"

"O! I don't know: some milk-sop sort of thing, such as people always say when it is a question of defending poachers."

"My dear," observed his lady, "I don't think the bishop defends poachers, does he? I heard him blame them severely, the last time I saw him."

"And where's the use of blaming them? Will any poacher stop poaching for being blamed? Hanging is the only thing. You will do no good short of that.—And how are the fellows to know that the bishop blames them?"

"Why," said the lady, putting down her knitting, "there is the most curious part of it. 'Tis

said that there was present, at that moment, one person, and perhaps more, who could have told the bishop all about the Waltham Blacks, and who knew, from experience, how they black their faces."

"You see, Sir," said Mr. Isherwood, "these people may have means of knowing that the bishop blames poaching. And suppose you desire your people to tell them, the next time they look close in their faces, in the way you described."

"If I catch one, you may depend upon it I will let him know of nothing short of the gallows."

"Then I hope you will not catch any; for I doubt the gallows doing any good in this case."

"You do! Then I am glad you are not a magistrate,—which is a thing we did wish. I hope you never will be a magistrate (though I mean no disrespect to you) as long as you hold such opinions."

"What opinions do you mean, neighbour?"

"Why, that poachers should not be punished, and that sort of thing."

"You mistake me. I would punish poachers, and all people who trespass and steal. But, as to hanging being the punishment, I doubt whether it does not make poaching worse than it was before."

"Then you must set to work again, Sir, and hang the more."

"That is one way of bringing the affair to an end, to be sure. You will finish either the deer or the men, sooner or later. But I think it would be wiser if we could find some way of keeping both men and deer alive."

"You can't, Sir. The deer are so reduced that the keepers say another such season will finish them.—It makes my blood boil to think of it."

"The whole affair is melancholy enough, to be sure: and now it seems to be desperate."

"Ah!" said the lady, "things have gone on from bad to worse so rapidly, that I wonder now whether we shall ever live in peace and quiet again. A few years ago, it was only hearing a shot now and then at night, and news next day that a warrant was wanted to search some house; and perhaps a man or two transported in the course of a year. Then, for every one transported, another set seemed to spring up. I don't know how it was."

"I think it probable," said Mr. Isherwood, "that there was such a demand for venison from London that it became worth while for the poachers to club together to get more, and to

defend each other.—And then, the more the deer were taken care of and increased in numbers, the more injury they did to the farmers in the neighbourhood; and that, we must allow, is a great provocation.”

“ Not at all, Sir,” exclaimed the squire. “ I deny it. I deny that the farmers have any right to complain of the deer. When they took their farms, they knew there were deer in the forest. And it is their business to keep them off their lands.”

“ Well, my dear,” said the lady, “ so they do. I know that this very season it has cost farmer Rasbrook three pounds to keep the deer off five acres of wheat, by fires and other means: and he did not fully succeed either.”

“ And to me it seems,” observed Mr. Isherwood, “ that justice requires that the owners of deer should prevent their trespassing on farmers’ fields.”

“ You are wrong, Sir; you are wrong. In no book of justice can you find any such regulation, as you will see when you come to be a magistrate. And besides, any man who is qualified may shoot any game that is trespassing on his own land;—except indeed these deer, which are, as they ought to be, excepted. And then again,

what are you to do with other game,—birds, for instance? How are you to prevent pheasants and partridges from getting into any farmer's fields?"

"We were speaking of the deer," replied Mr. Isherwood. "If the deer are at large, and if our neighbouring farmers are not qualified sportsmen, and if they could not shoot the bishop's deer if they were, it can be no great wonder that the deer are shot in the forest as they are."

"You see," said the squire, "it is such easy work! The poaching fellows know the walks of the forest as well as the keepers; and their scouts can always secure them a safe range: and the farmers round are friendly, for their own ends; and there are plenty of venison butchers in London ready to give a good price for all that can be got. You see it is all as easy as can be: and we can't help ourselves but by making the law as severe as we can."

"And has that helped you? Has the Black Act put down your Waltham gang?"

"'Tis ten times worse, this year," sighed the lady.

"There's the wickedness of the people!" said the squire. "They set themselves more and more against the law, and do any violence rather

than let a poacher get into the hands of justice. 'Tis said, and I believe it, that they are now so strong, and so determined, that they would pull a magistrate's house down, sooner than let half-a-dozen of their gang go to Winchester jail."

"I believe it too," replied Mr. Isherwood, "and I don't wonder at it, if they know that those half-dozen men will otherwise be hanged. If those half-dozen men were to be fined, or imprisoned as for trespass or other thefts of equal value, I do not think there would be any fear for magistrates' houses. As it is, I foretell that this Black Act will operate in this way, as far as it concerns your forest :—it will cause the destruction of the deer, after having fostered such ideas and habits of lawlessness in the people, far and near, as the district will suffer from for many a year after the venison-question is at an end."

"The bishop can always re-stock, you know. But I am wrong: you know nothing about the matter, Isherwood. You don't care a damn for gentlemen's rights. You are all on the side of the poachers."

"It is rather difficult, I believe," replied Mr. Isherwood, "to say on which side the sporting gentlemen are. Some believe that there are more in the Waltham gang than our neighbourhood could

yield. But I know your meaning, squire: and I assure you you are mistaken.—I saw that magnificent eagle that, you remember, was afterwards shot,—the noblest of the forest poachers.”

The squire stared.

“I saw that eagle one day, floating high over the forest; and now sinking and sinking towards the open parts, and”

“Ay! he kept clear of the woody parts,” interrupted the squire. “They would becalm him when he wanted to rise.”

“I saw him,” continued Mr. Isherwood, “pounce on a leveret which was crossing a glade, and soar away with it to the southern rocks. And another day I came up when the keeper had just missed him, after he had killed a hind. When I saw the swoop the first time, and the soaring away the second, I could not but understand the kingly bird’s delight in his forest sport. He came from dreary and desolate places, and heartily must he have enjoyed himself in this green and sunny region, all abounding with game, and satisfying to his instinct of sport.—And this showed me what must have been the raptures of our kings in the chase. They came from a dreary and desolate life,—from cares and quarrels, and disappointments, and irksome labours, to make

holiday in the free and joyous woods ; and I can well understand how their hearts leaped up when the old trees waved, and the stag burst out from the covert, and the horse panted and bounded under them, and the woodland rang with the sounds of the chase, and . . . ”

“ And what would you say,” cried the squire, who had started from his seat, “ what would you say to a set of poachers that had rooted out your king’s deer ? ”

“ I should have said that there must be something wrong, where men would band together in such enmity to a particular kind of pleasure of the king’s. And I should have been for looking into the matter, to find the true reason of it, instead of putting out poachers’ eyes, and cutting off their hands and feet, as was done by those kings.”

The lady shuddered.

“ May I ask,” resumed Mr. Isherwood, “ why we shudder at the mention of these mutilations, when we now hang for similar offences ? Is it less to take away a man’s life than the members of his body ? ”

As no answer was forthcoming, he went on.

“ As I can understand the king’s pleasure of old, so I can enter into the pleasures of sporting gentlemen now. In themselves, they are cheering

to look upon,—cheering to think of, here by the autumn fireside. But if, from some cause, offences always follow in their train,—if they occasion, by any means, the death of men upon the gallows, I should still be for looking further into the matter, and seeing what the fatality is that pursues this kind of pleasure.”

“Fatality!” exclaimed the squire. “Why, Isherwood, I thought you had been a religious man.”

“My dear,” remonstrated his lady, “who ever doubted it? I am sure Mr. Isherwood is one who fears God and honours the king. You see he honours the king’s pleasures.”

“And I so fear God,” replied Mr. Isherwood, very gravely, “that I tremble to see men, created by Him, maimed or killed for some radical disagreement between the laws made by us and an instinct conferred by Him. When our laws and His clash, we can have no doubt which is wrong. I, as a religious man, take my stand on His.”

The lady put down her knitting. The squire looked utterly confounded; for he had conducted all his magisterial proceedings in the name of religion as well as law.

“Well!” declared the lady, “I always said it

was like an instinct, or a fatality, or something, that men were so given to run after game. Men who would no more think of coveting our sheep or fowls than of stealing my silk gowns or my purse are out after hares and pheasants, every year of their lives ; and I am afraid after deer too, when they can join a company. And the more convictions there are, the more unable they seem to refrain.”

“ I always tell the poachers that come before me,” said the squire, “ how much worse it is to take game than sheep and fowls ; and how the law shows it to be the worst of the two.”

“ And how do they answer you ?”

“ Answer me ! That is a pretty idea ! They are there to hear what I have to say, and not to lecture me.”

“ Yet,” said Mr. Isherwood, “ one would like to know what they have to say.”

“ I have often thought so,” said the lady. “ They tell me, when they talk privately with me, that there is the difference between sheep and hares, and between poultry and pheasants, that the game are wild and the others not. A man now in the jail at Winchester told me he was so vexed with the injury done to his little field by the wild animals that he thought it no wrong to kill them

wherever he met them, night or day. He said that if our cows got into his field, or our hens into his garden, he could complain, and desire that we would keep our beasts and fowls at home; and he could get reparation for the trespass and mischief. But when the hares came and made lanes through his corn, and the pheasants fed on his seed-corn, he had no redress;—he could not tell to whom they belonged. He could neither keep them out, nor compel any one else to keep them at home.”

“ I should like to know who could keep hares at home,—or pheasants either,—any more than wood-pigeons,” exclaimed the squire.

“ Just so, my dear. That was what the poor fellow said. And he said if God made these creatures to rove and fly, so that no man could keep them at home, it must be fair that any man should have them on whose lands they were doing any injury. And moreover, that men should have the free use of them wherever they fell in with them, because they are always mischievous to farmers, and because God made them as free to all men as rats and weasels, and pigeons and crows.—I cannot help wishing that every man who has a field or a garden might have liberty to take whatever he finds injuring his

crops. I trust the law will do this much for him, sooner or later."

"What! for unqualified men! My dear, you should not talk of what you don't understand. How should an unqualified man, like that fellow you speak of, kill game?"

"I think that time may come," said Mr. Isherwood;—"a time for larger liberty to all parties,—when an owner of land may shoot as well as take pheasants, partridges and moor game on his own estate, which he cannot legally do now"

"But we do, Sir; we do it every day of our lives,—in the season, that is," said the squire.

"I know it: but you break the law in so doing, as certainly as the poachers you send to jail. If you look closely into the law, you will find it is so.—In time, this absurd restriction will be taken off, no doubt; and so, I trust, will be others which now afflict and injure the farmer and cottager; but, in those days, men will think and feel, as they do at present, that animals and birds which cannot be kept at home, and which cannot be identified, have none of the sacredness of property, and they will help themselves freely to such creatures, just as they do now, all laws notwithstanding. If we could look into the world

again in the middle of the nineteenth century, we should find farmers still complaining, the poor still poaching, magistrates still filling the jails with offenders against the game laws, and the sympathy of the most numerous classes still with the victims rather than the owners of the game."

"The law must be upheld, however," declared the squire.

"I would have law inviolate, and custom revered," observed Mr. Isherwood, "and therefore I would have only laws that are practicable, and customs that are just.—No law will be found practicable which endeavours to preserve such mischievous animals as the Waltham deer in an uninclosed forest, in an age when the surrounding country is under tillage. You might as well attempt to continue the race of lions and bears in a country full of villages. In a little while, not a lion or bear would be left, under any laws you could make; though lion and bear hunts were very fine things in their day; and are so still, in their proper places."

"It would be very hard upon us sportsmen," said the squire, "if you had your way."

"Time and change are hard upon the sportsman," replied Mr. Isherwood: "and they will go on to be harder and harder till that order of

gentlemen find themselves obliged to seek their sport only in places where it and its objects injure nobody. Meantime, it is as well to remember that other people have their hardships too ; as, for instance, the farmers here whose crops help to feed the Waltham deer.”

“What *is* the matter ?” exclaimed the lady, as the butler entered the room in a way very unlike his usual quiet and decorous manner.

“If you would please to look out, Sir, from the back door,” said he to his master, “there is a large fire somewhere not far off.—I have sent Joe to see and bring us word.”

“A fire !” sighed the lady. “God have mercy ! Where will this end ?”

The squire returned in an instant, all aghast. The fire was in the direction of Mr. Isherwood’s, and certainly no further off.

CHAPTER V.

PRANK AND PANIC.

POLLY was this evening salting her new butter, thinking the while somewhat soberly of the strange disorder which had entered their household. She was persuaded that her father was uneasy under it. He had spoken sharply to Asher about his wildness, though the lad had done nothing wild till his father led the way ; and the farmer had told her, three times over, without the subject being in any way led to, that in a few days he should have received compensation for the expense he had been put to by the deer, and then they must settle down, and have no more irregular doings this winter. Polly well knew that this expected money was from the sale of the venison which had now for three nights been sent off in large quantities to London : and she hoped, full as earnestly as her father, that the Blacks would now soon disband for this time, and leave the district in peace.

This night's poaching, she believed, was to be the last; and there seemed some doubt whether they would not to-night be met by some force which would render it advisable for them to close their enterprise. She wished that morning was come. While so thinking, the door opened, and she started.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Polly," said the man who entered, turning up the black crape which covered his face.

"O! Mr. Bob! what brings you here?"

"Only that I am pretty well tired of my post, and thought I should be better amused here. Your quiet neighbour gives us no sport at all,—never tries to let fly so much as a little bird with his message to my dad and the rest. Not a thing have we seen more amusing than an old butler, or a frightened housemaid, peeping out of an attic window, to learn whether we were still there.—However, all is safe; and we are likely to have our night's sport undisturbed."

"I wish you would give it up," said Polly. "I am sure you have done and got quite enough for this time."

"Why, how now, Miss Polly? Who would have looked for such a craven speech from you?"

"I have had enough of these doings, Mr. Bob,

if you have not. I declare it quite tries my spirits.” And Polly’s voice trembled.

“ Ah! now,” said Mr. Bob, “ this is what it is to look on in any ticklish sport, instead of taking part in it. I could cure you, Polly, in a minute or two, of this odd new complaint of yours,—these blue devils; and I will, as soon as you please.”

“ I wish you would,” said Polly; “ for I don’t like them at all.”

“ I wish I had you in the middle of the forest, and you and I would poach at a nice rate.”

“ I! I poach!”

“ Yes. I’ll tell you. We would watch for a fine fellow of a buck, coming out of a covert;—coming out slowly, you know, and looking warily about him as he goes. Then you should play on your shepherd’s pipe . . . Now, your laughing shows how little you know about the matter. There is nothing that fixes a deer so well as music. You should play a soft note or two on your pipe; and he would stop, and listen a moment, and then turn his large, soft, bright eye upon our covert: and, the instant before he saw us, I should have let fly, and there we should have him!”

“ O! cruel!” cried Polly. “ To beguile him with music, that you might take aim! Do you

think I would play the pipe in such a tricksy way as that?"

"Well, then, we would change parts. You should fire, and I would whistle. A whistle, if it is soft and low, would do almost as well as a pipe. Only you must promise not to make me laugh, just at the critical moment.—What hand are you at a rifle, Miss Polly?"

"How can I tell till I try?"

"Come, then, let us try."

And Mr. Bob loaded his rifle, and called her out to the front of the house.

"Stay; let me look out first," said Polly. "Your gipsy brown is not enough without either your cap or your crape. Suppose you put on my cloak and bonnet."

"No, no. There is nobody in the way: and if there were, two women rifle-shooting would bring them up when they would think nothing of seeing a man practising, at a time when the Blacks are known to be out."

There was nobody at hand; and forth they went.

"It is rather dark, to be sure," observed Mr. Bob: "but give me a piece of white paper, two inches square, and I will prick it up against yonder elm, for a mark.—There now!—That's right!

You will do, I see.—Don't be afraid ! The beauty of a rifle for a woman's shooting is that it does not bounce. Now for it!"

Polly hit the mark : and she was pleased ; for she liked to try her hand at everything, and to do everything well that she tried. She was conscious of just so much accident about the matter, however, that she declined a second attempt, lest she should lose her credit.

Mr. Bob was really about to propose her searching for some kind of whistle or pipe, and going out deer shooting with him, as a little snug private venture, which might be made a joke of in case of their being overtaken by any keeper who might have courage to follow up the shot, when the attention of both was caught by the appearance of fire, not very far off.

Mr. Bob muttered an oath, ran into the house, put on his crape and his hat, and was gone.

Polly could not stay long behind. The fire presently flared less ; but it became a redder and steadier burning. Where to seek her father and brother she knew not : and there was not a neighbour to whom she dared own this, except such as she had reason to suppose were with the Blacks. The suspense was soon unendurable. She locked the door, and ran at full speed, guided by the

light of the fire, and soon by the shouts of a crowd, mingled with the roar of flames.

"O ! thank God ! it is only the furze !" cried she, stopping at the turn of the lane, and laying both hands on her throbbing heart.

It was a beautiful sight to her, relieved in mind as she now was. The flames seemed to flit and dance, like spirits, over the space of common in front of her ;—to flit and then alight, and shoot up, and crackle and spread, and then make another leap. Polly's heart leaped with them, and she could not help calling out to an acquaintance who was running past,

"A pretty fright I have had ; and you too, I dare say ; and all because some silly boy has set the furze on fire. I might have guessed what it was. Well ! I shall not be so easily scared next time."

"Why, come on, mistress !" cried the man, beckoning as he ran. "It's catching Squire Isherwood's house, they say."

Again Polly flew, at her utmost speed. She found enough to be alarmed at when she came in full view of the scene.

The spread of the fire was terrible, leaping as it did from the furze on the common to the fence of Mr. Isherwood's kitchen garden ; from the fence

to the wood pile ; from the wood pile to the doors and roofs of the offices ; and thence to point after point of the main building, till it was clear that the whole must go.—It was also fearful to see how the country people came rushing down to the scene of the fire, while the Waltham Blacks were still in considerable numbers on the spot, though many had stolen away, more careful of their own safety than of Mr. Isherwood's property. It was fearful to see her father, wholly forgetting his blackened face and the risks he ran, toiling away to put out the fire, and get his neighbours to help him. He made them form a line from the pond to the fire, and pass from hand to hand such buckets as they had been able to obtain : and there he stood, a Waltham Black confessed, in the row of his yellow-faced neighbours, as the fire shone equally upon them all. Yet more fearful was it to see, through smoke and the darkness of the night, fitfully lighted up by the fire, rank beyond rank of horsemen approaching rapidly.

Polly did not stop for a second glance. She rushed down among the crowd, and forced her way with the strength of vehemence to where her father stood. He either would not attend to her prayers that he would come home, or go somewhere out of sight, or he could not hear her amidst

the hubbub,—the din of shouts, screams and roaring of flames. But she distinctly heard him say, as he pointed to the house-key which she still held in her hand,

“ Go you home, child ! You are wanted there. Mr. Bob is hurt, and gone there. Go you home, I say.”

She saw there was nothing else to be done ; and half frantic, home she ran.

When she burst into the house, she found it already entered from the back. Mr. Bob was lying along the settle by the hearth, and a labourer’s wife whom Asher had brought in from the neighbourhood, had taken off his coat, and was cutting open his waistcoat and shirt, to save him pain. A falling beam had struck him on the shoulder, and bruised him severely ; but it did not appear that any bones were broken, though the patient declared his belief that they all were.—Asher gave no help, till reproached by his sister for his standing in a corner, as if asleep. When he came forward to the light, such was his expression of countenance, and his paleness, that his sister left her patient for a moment, threw her arms about his neck, and gave him a kiss which brought him to salutary tears.

“ Come, Asher,” said the neighbour’s wife,

"this is no time for crying. Do you go to the squire's, and ask my lady for some medicine for a sore bruise: and say, you know . . . "

Asher was snatching up his cap, eager to be gone, when his sister said,

"Nonsense, Goody, to talk of sending to the Squire's to-night! I won't have anybody go. I know very well what to do with this shoulder. We will get it washed, and put the—the—the stranger to-bed: and by that time you can go home to your children, and my father will be in from the fire.—Will you please to tell us your name, stranger?"

"John Joker," groaned Mr. Bob, as if it was a most melancholy piece of intelligence.

"I never heard the name in these parts," observed the neighbour. "I suppose you be from a distance."

"O yes; from a place much nearer the sun than this. Don't you see how brown my face is?"

"Yes,—just your face is brown, to be sure."

"Now, be quiet, and finish," said Polly, peremptorily.

She was very glad to be rid of the neighbour when Mr. Bob had been helped to bed. She begged her patient to compose himself to sleep, if possible. And eager she was that he should sleep, that she might go down, and learn from

Asher how these disasters had happened.—She stood by the window, looking out, but as still as a mouse, when the impatient breathings and mutterings of Mr. Bob became aggravated to a loud groan.

“I am afraid you are very bad,” she observed.

“Bad indeed! I am growing as stiff as a church steeple. And I have got a wedge in my shoulder-joint. And, Miss Polly, I am afraid we are all ruined.”

“Ah! Mr. Bob, that is your worst pain, I fancy. But don’t think about that now, when you can do no good.”

“I don’t think it is the worst pain: I cannot admit that,” said he with another groan. “I would bear a good many more sins on this shoulder, to have it in condition to bear anything. Now it will bear nothing; and it is more than I can do to bear it.”

“And I dare say,” said Polly, “you could very well bear to have a few more Waltham men in the scrape about the deer, if you were out of it, and safe in London. That is the way with gentlemen who like their pleasure, I know.”

“Before you lay so much upon me, Miss Polly, ask Asher who got us into this scrape about the fire.”

The tone in which he said this made Polly rush to the bed-side, and say, sinking on her knees,

"You do not mean to say it was Asher."

"It was Asher. He did not mean to fire the house : but he is such a pranky imp ! He might have known the house must catch, with the wind in that quarter."

"But what did he do ? Who told you ? You were not there."

"Plenty of the gang told me. They all know it. It oozed out somehow from the house that Squire Isherwood was not within. And it was agreed that he could only just have got out, as certainly not a mouse had left by daylight. Asher and the other boys had got merry ; and they said they would raise Squire Isherwood, if he was hidden near. And Asher fired the furze."

Polly ran down stairs. Asher was again standing by the wall, now leaning his head on his arm.

"Asher, did you fire the furze ?" asked his sister, in a low and calm voice.

"Yes : but I never thought of mischief to the house."

"You must go,—you must fly,—now, this moment,—before people return from the fire. I will put up a few clothes, and I have a little money by me."

"I had rather stay, and meet everything."

"Had you? If they would but remember how young you are!" said she, looking with tearful eyes in his face. "But, Asher, they may hang you at Winchester."

"Let them!" said he.

"No, no: better go away for a while. You may come back, some day, and help father as he grows old . . ."

A deadly doubt whether her father would grow old by her side choked her voice. When she could speak, she said in an imploring tone,

"O! Asher, go! that I may have you to look to hereafter. I must have you out of danger."

"And where can I go? I do not know any place, or any person away from here."

"You can but try.—O! I see. Try the person in London who buys the venison. Tell him you are one of those in a scrape about the venison. For his own sake he will not give you up. For his own sake he will be more likely to help you. Mr. Bob will tell us where he lives in London."

Mr. Bob made an effort to scrawl a note to the person in question; and with this, a small bundle, and a little money, Asher set off.

"Go round through the fields," said his sister, "and do not strike the London road within three

or four miles. And do not look so miserable when daylight comes, or everybody you meet will see there is something the matter.—And O ! Asher, do not get into lawless courses in London. We were so happy . . .”

She could not say more.

“ It was the deer,—and then Mr. Bob and his company,” said Asher.

“ Well ! there are no deer in London streets ; and Mr. Bob, I suppose, will attend to his business, when he goes up again. But there are always lawless courses for those who have once begun ; and the London people, they say, are very ready for mischievous pranks when they see such gentlemen as Mr. Bob lead the way.—Now go,—before my father comes home. Now go, dear dear Asher !”

Their father did not come home. The restless and wretched daughter watched for him till daylight, with too sure a foreboding that he would never come home again.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL UP !

POLLY was making some herb tea the next morning, for her patient's breakfast, when the Squire's lady entered, followed by Mrs. Betty with a basket, covered with a white cloth. Polly's heart sank at the sight.

"Bless me, child ! how you look !" cried the lady. "Is your sick guest dead ?"

"O dear no, ma'am," said Polly, forcing a laugh ; "nor like to die. It is nothing."

Then, seeing that the lady was still looking at her red eyes and pale face, she said she had got her eyes full of smoke at the fire last night ; and then had to sit up for her father ; and very tired she now was.

"And what time did your father get home, my dear ?" asked the lady.

Polly looked aside as she answered that she had not exactly observed what the hour was. The next moment, she met the eye of Mrs. Betty, so fixed upon her as to make her cheeks more red

than they had been pale before. Mrs. Betty then kindly looked out of the window.

"It is the worst fire that has happened in this district within the memory of this generation," observed the lady. "Everything is gone,—stacks, stables, cow and horses, house, library, furniture, plate"

"Is Squire Isherwood ruined?" asked Polly faintly.

"No, child; of course not. The county must pay the damage. But he has lost what nothing can pay him for;—his old plate, and beautiful pictures: and I, for my part, cannot help thinking of his mother's rare old china. But what he feels most is the loss of his library. And yet, I should not say that: for I am sure what he feels most is that he should have enemies who could wish to burn him in his own house."

"O, ma'am!" cried Polly, in unaffected horror. "How can anybody say such a dreadful thing? Such a kind good gentleman as Squire Isherwood is!"

"True, my dear. But what else can anybody say or think? He was a prisoner in his own house, caught, and shut up there by the Waltham Blacks: and there he was, to the best of their belief, when they set fire to his house."

"And one man," added Mrs. Betty, "was set with a pitchfork in his hand, to pitch him back into the flames, if he should try to escape."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Polly. "It is all bad enough, without people saying such things. And Squire Isherwood did escape?"

"In a providential way that they knew nothing about," said the lady, nodding mysteriously.

"They knew it, depend upon it," protested Polly. "It will all turn out an accident, you will see: and bad enough it is, that way. They knew Squire Isherwood was safe, depend upon it."

"One would think you knew it," observed Mrs. Betty, who did not like being baulked of a tale of atrocity.

"Not I!" said Polly. "I did not know till you came what had become of Squire Isherwood at all."

"Well now, I wonder you did not ask your father that, the first thing when he came in."

"My father would be sure to tell me, first thing, if a hair of Squire Isherwood's head was hurt," retorted Polly.

"Come, Betty, we must not lose time," said her mistress. "We have our hands full to-day. I will just step up, and see John Joker, Polly. If it is really only a bruise, I have something here

that will be sure to set him up. And then I will look to your eyes."

After a few hasty attempts at fibbing, which had no chance against the pertinacity of the lady, Polly saw that she could do nothing but give her patient warning who was coming. She therefore ran up, to see, as she said, whether he was awake yet ; and before she could get out her news, the tap of the high heels was heard upon the stairs.

"I must leave him to his own wits," thought Polly, as she re-entered the kitchen, having passed the lady and her maid on the stairs. "I must leave him to his own wits now. I am sure he has driven us to the end of ours. I have none left to help him with."

"John Joker," said the lady, drawing near the bed, "I hear you are badly bruised."

Mr. Bob had, at the expense of a terrible twinge, thrust his head into his gipsy woman's cap, on hearing that his mother was coming to see him. It was now too late to take it off again, stiff as he was.

"O dear!" said the lady, drawing back. "This is not the person. Betty, this is somebody else. Look into the next room, and see if John Joker is there."

"There is nobody else, ma'am," said Betty,

returning. "I think, ma'am, this is the person; perhaps with a wound on the head, ma'am, and a woman's cap to keep the dressings on better."

"Are you hurt on the head, John Joker?"

"Yes,—stand away;—don't come near me,—I can't bear a touch," whined the patient fretfully.

"In that case, I must see your tongue," observed the lady. "It will not hurt you to put out your tongue."

Her quick and decided hand turned down the bed-clothes from the face in a moment.

She staggered a step back, and then sat down suddenly on the bed.—The next moment she said,

"You may leave the basket, Betty, and go down stairs. And—ah! yes,—you can step to Daddy Green's, and hear how the old man's leg is to-day."

"Why, ma'am," said Betty, "I was afraid you had tripped against something that hurt you,—you popped down"

"Nonsense, Betty,—go."

Almost before the door was closed, the lady clasped the bed-post, and leaned her head and her heaving bosom against it. Neither of the wretched pair spoke for some moments. Bob broke the silence.

"Mother, you take this too seriously."

No reply but a smothered sob.

"Mother, I wish you would not take it so seriously. I am very little hurt. That was all nonsense about a wound in the head. I am only bruised. And as for the rest, you know it is the way, in these days, for young men to run down into the country, now and then, for a little fun."

His mother turned her convulsed face towards him, and he instantly hid his in the bed-clothes.

"Bob, tell me," said she, "are you one of the Waltham Blacks?"

"Yes, mother, I am."

There was another pause, when he said,

"I know all you would say. I"

"Not you!" said his mother. "If you knew a hundredth part of it, you would never have brought us, or our wretched neighbours, to this pass. You, who should know the law,—you who should know our neighbours, their ignorance, their temptations, the horrible jeopardy the new law places them in;—you"

"Stop, mother . . . Stop O! mother"

He appeared to be choking. She hastened to him, as a bird flits at the plaint of its young. She raised his head. He turned his face upon her bosom, and wept till her muslin handkerchief was wet through and through with his tears.

“ My poor son ! You did not think to have ever been so unhappy. What a light-hearted boy you were ! ”

“ Mother, I wish I was dead.”

“ That is a cowardly wish. Pray that you may be well and strong soon,—and endeavour your utmost to be so, that you may try whether anything can be done for your poor companions who lie under peril of death.”

“ Alas ! what can I or any one do ? The law is clear ;—the Act was passed to meet this very case. I myself am in the greatest peril of all, if the facts were known.”

He felt his mother’s whole frame shudder as he spoke.

“ Knowing this, how *could* you . . . ? ”

“ Why, mother, there is something in the lawlessness of the present time,—something to account for my madness. Every young man I know, and many an one who is not young, is for ever looking about for occasions of frolic : and this fashion of frolic is the hardest in the world for one to resist. And then, there never was a time, I suppose, when men full of spirits and sport could abstain from the pursuit of wild animals. From the king to the peasant boy, the propensity is so strong, that everything has been

sacrificed to it. And it is not likely that such a propensity should now, in our lawless times, be for the first time governable."

"With this dreadful Black Act staring all men in the face!" sighed his mother.

"If it had not been so dreadful, it would have been more regarded. I, a law-student, could never till this moment practically feel and know that men would be hanged for shooting deer in an open place, with their faces blacked, or wearing women's clothes. I could not for a moment feel that such a fate could overtake me for such an offence: and if I could not, how should the country-people stop to be wise,—with the deer before their eyes, feeding upon their corn? O! mother,—it may be, and it is, a sin for us to go out against the deer: but it is, I am sure, a far deeper sin to legislate so murderously against such a propensity, while the deer are left roaming abroad and mischievous, so as to make obedience too hard to the people against whom the law is aimed.—I say nothing for myself. I shall never forgive myself; nor ask any but God to forgive me. But I will ever say that every Waltham man, who suffers for this business, is murdered by act of Parliament."

"Then, my son, your duty is clear. Preserve

yourself by care and self-command, to see if anything can be done for the rescue of these poor culprits. I will go, and try my small powers of persuasion with those who know more, and can reason better than I."

"Do! bless you, mother, go, and speak from the very depth of your kind heart."

"I shall be glad to have something useful to do while I must not be with you. For your safety, Bob, it is absolutely necessary that I should come here no more than if you were a sick stranger; if, indeed, it is safe to come at all. O! that you were in London! Is there no way?"

"Plan some way of having me carried there, mother. I shall never get better here, with you so near, but separated from me; and my father, I fear, so harsh. . . ."

"Ah! that is hopeless," sighed the lady. "Your father thinks it his duty to pursue these people to the gallows. But Mr. Isherwood. . . ."

"Though he has lost everything he cared for," said Bob, with an agonised countenance. "But he is generous."

"He is more than generous; he is just," said the lady. "And I know he condemns the Black Act, as far as it relates to the Waltham deer. But, as to the firing of his house. . . ."

"That was accident, mother."

She shook her head.

"It was, I assure you. An idle boy of the gang fired the furze, never thinking of the wind, nor of any dwelling. If you would bring Mr. Isherwood here, I would convince him of it."

"I dare not, Bob. I will bring nobody here. But I will see Mr. Isherwood, and then go to the bishop."

"Do, mother. Lose not a moment."

She had risen to go.

"Never mind me!" said Bob, earnestly. "Do not upset yourself with saying another word to me. And do not come again, mother. Let us not meet again till—till—O! I know not when!"

She gave him a glance which he felt no time or events would efface from his heart, and left the room.

Polly stood at the foot of the stairs, pale and shrunken as by a month's illness. She looked wistfully at the lady, and merely whispered—

"My father and your son. . . ."

"Is your father in danger?"

"Carried to Winchester jail, Mrs. Betty says. . . ." She could utter no more.

"Now, God help us, for two wretched beings as ever lived on his earth!" wept the lady. "Polly, I will strain every nerve for your father. . . ."

" You will ? Then thank God !" cried Polly.

" I will,—I will indeed : but O ! Polly, guard my poor boy ! Never leave the house ! Never unbar this door ! Never let neighbour, or the dearest friend you have in the world, know that you have any one in the house.—Cannot you shut up the house, as if you were gone away ? "

" I will,—this minute. But the beasts—the cows and the pigs. . . ."

" Leave that to me. Shut up the house, and answer to no knock whatever till I send in the night,—(I cannot yet say what night—) to have my son carried to London. Then you must come to my house, Polly."

They arranged the signal by which the lady's messenger might be known ; and then the lady caught up Betty's basket, and hastened out lest Mrs. Betty herself should appear.

Once more, however, the harassed mother turned back, to empty her purse upon the table. Then, she cast her arm round Polly's neck, and strained her to her bosom, saying

" Save him—hide him and save him now, and I will take care of you and cherish you, as long as you live ! "

" I will do all I can," said Polly ; " but I don't care what becomes of me."

CONCLUSION.

MR. BOB was conveyed away, in the course of two or three nights, in safety, but at a cost of anxiety and terror which turned his mother's hair white, and furrowed her face, so as to excite the wonder of her neighbours, and cause mysterious whispers at a time when every one had enough of news to tell aloud to all he met. Mr. Bob became a capital lawyer ; but he lost all his fine spirits, and turned out by no means the genial character which everybody had expected from the sprightliness of his youth. His father stood in great awe of him, and grew less severe in his magisterial decisions, and less peremptory in the manner of giving them, even in game cases, and when his son was not at his elbow, than he had ever been before Mr. Bob was a lawyer.

Mr. Bob escaped. But all else connected with the transactions of our story was as black and dreary as the law which ordered the catastrophe. Legal vengeance had full play, in retribution

for the deeds of that brief season. It was the extreme severity of the law which caused the organization of so formidable a band :—it was the extent and force of this band and its organization which caused the magistrates to be passive, and the officers of justice supine in their function. And now that the band was broken up, the reaction was violent, and a cruel law was enforced in a vindictive spirit. Every magistrate who delighted in game was eager to see poachers punished. Every constable who had seen pass him in the streets culprits against whom he had warrants in his pocket which he dared not execute, was consoled when he saw them and their comrades in irons or at the bar. The Waltham Blacks were a fallen foe,—or at first supposed to be so ; and those of them who were caught had no mercy to expect. As they passed through the streets of Winchester in companies,—passed from the jail to the gallows,—they could only hope that their comrades yet at large would take warning, and let the game alone.

It might have been thought that the warning was abundant ; for the law was sufficiently preached and expounded by the spectacle of the hangings. It was pretty well known henceforward that “to appear armed in any inclosed

forest or place where deer are usually kept, or in any warren for hares and conies, or in any high road, open heath, common or down, by day or night, with faces blacked or otherwise disguised, or (being so disguised) to hunt, wound, kill or steal any deer, to rob a warren, or to steal fish, or to procure by gift or promise of reward any person to join them in such unlawful act, is felony without benefit of clergy."—That such was the law, all were reminded who passed farmer Rasbrook's place, during the years that it stood vacant, and who sighed to think that that man, though not wise, should have died on the gallows,—that his spirited boy should have disappeared, and his gay daughter Polly should never have been seen to smile since the night of the fire at Mr. Isherwood's. Instead of the merry laugh which might formerly be heard from the farm at any hour of the day, there was now only the ominous cry of the owl from the roof-tree. Instead of busy figures which used to trip from kitchen to dairy, and from dairy to poultry-yard, there was now a blank solitude, unless those told the truth who said that farmer Rasbrook's ghost trailed about the premises at night, groaning bitter groans, and appearing to be searching for his children. These things were enough to prevent

any one taking the farm ; and one would have thought they would be sufficient to deter men from following the deer : but they were not. The poaching in the forest went on till there were no deer left to make it worth while.

Some of the neighbouring gentry were, on their part, no less slow to learn. When Bishop Hoadley was translated to Winchester, he was urged to restock the forest.

“ No,” said he, “ I think we have had mischief enough already from the Waltham deer.”

HEATHENDOM IN CHRISTENDOM.

HEATHENDOM IN CHRISTENDOM.

CHAPTER I.

PROVOKING ONE ANOTHER.

As the mail-coach drew up before the Rampant Horse, in a village in the West of England, some nine years before the first English railway was opened, the guard called out to the awaiting porter,

“ Is Horner here ? ”

“ Just come.”

“ All right. Here I stop, then. I’m not well. I’m going to stop. I mind my own business, as I say : and let other people mind theirs.”

When the other guard had taken his place, and the mail was out of sight, the porter said to the stout and jolly invalid,

“ What ails ye now ? ”

“ I—I have not been very prudent, you see. I

took a bottle of porter upon something else it had no business with, and I feel like bursting. Curse me if 'tis not like a July day,—quite unseasonable," said he, wiping his face and forehead.—"But come now, to business! I mind my own business, as I say; and let others look to theirs. I want to see Tom Tippet. Do you go after him; and meantime I'll speak to Lane here."

"O ay! I see," said the porter, with a nod. And off he went, to find Tom Tippet, while the guard plunged immediately into close consultation with Lane, the landlord of the Rampant Horse.

When little Tom Tippet came up the street, as fast as his very short legs would bring him, the guard and landlord separated with nods of intelligence, and Tippet was desired to follow the guard into a private room.

There, while the guard puffed and groaned, and unbuttoned coat and waistcoat, on account of what he called the extreme heat, which was imperceptible to everybody else, Tippet stood awaiting his communications, with a look as bright as that of a schoolboy expecting the announcement of a holiday.

"So you have orders for us," he said, rubbing his hands. "Let us hear."

"Yes," said the guard, seating himself. "Plenty of orders, as far as that goes. You know the Lord Mayor's day is coming on, and the gentry are getting back to town. Ludlam does not know which way to turn himself for game; and he says every other poult erer in London complains the same."

"Where's the difficulty?" said Tippet. "Here is a set of brave fellows of us, the same as last year."

"Why, man, 'tis the law;—the new law. It is seven years' transportation now for men to go after game at night in any way whatever. And there is not a gentleman's steward or butler in London that is not as peremptory as the king with the poult erers about having game,—threatening to buy nothing if they cannot depend on game for the table, for the season."

"Well, I don't know," said Tippet. "We are a set of brave fellows here, you know, and game as plentiful as ever. I don't see that we need trouble our heads to do any differently from what we have always done. I'll ask farmer Rush."

"As you please about that. I mind my own business, as I say; and my business is to see what game can be got for Lord Mayor's Day. Let others mind theirs. That's what I say."

"I will bring Rush, and another or two, shall I? What are the prices offered?"

"O, very good. I have got them all in my head, to tell the right folks at the right time."

Tippet moved off, somewhat offended at not being treated as a principal in an affair in which he was always a brisk and eager mover.

When he returned in the evening with farmer Rush, Noyse the joiner, and farmer Wells's sons Tim and Solomon, the guard was just yawning and stretching himself after a heavy sleep, which he complained had not cooled him much. So he called for some cold rum and milk before proceeding to business.

He was rather annoyed to find that the rest of the company differed from Tippet in dwelling more on the great aggravation of the law than on the largeness of the order he brought, and the goodness of the prices offered.

"It is taking too much out of us altogether," declared Solomon Wells. "We lost fifty-pounds worth of our crops this very season, in the two fields next the Colonel's and Miss Fermor's covers; and"

"And the vetches were lost," his brother put in. "Father says one hundred and twenty pounds would not cover our losses from the game this

season. And if the colonel's steward and the lady's will not take a word of notice of our complaints, they can hardly wonder if we make up what we can out of the game that we have fed.— I say that, in reason, it is more our game than theirs. We feed it; and it does little more with them than roost upon their trees, and couch in their covers.”

“The law was too severe before,” said farmer Rush: “and now transportation is more than men will bear to hear of. No man is more pleased than I am to see gentlemen enjoy themselves in sport when they do not encroach too much upon their neighbours. But to see a woman like Henrietta Fermor keeping up such a head of game as she does, damaging every field and garden round, for her gamekeepers and a strange gentleman or two to shoot, is what I never liked to see. It was but a small comfort that we took a handful now and then,—a trifle not worth mentioning in comparison of what we had fed”

“Fed,” declared Tim Wells, “just the same, my father says, as if her pheasants and hares had supped on our crown pieces.”

“It was a small comfort,” resumed Rush, “to get back a trifle of our vetches and wheat in the shape of Henrietta Fermor’s pheasants and hares. And

now, the law makes that a matter for transportation ! It won't and it shan't be borne."

" I mind my own business," said the guard ; " and, as I say, other people must mind theirs. I have nothing to do with the law. But what am I to say to Ludlam ? That is my business."

" O ! he shall have the game, of course," said Rush. " Be quiet, Tippet. It is no such merry matter, I can tell you. If you get transported, what is to become of your old mother ? "

" O," said Tippet, lightly, " I might as well say if you get transported, what is to become of your old father ?—and your wife and children into the bargain ? You know it will never come to that."

" I know it never shall come to that, in these parts, if we in these parts declare our minds like men."

" How ?" asked more than one voice.

" That is what we have to consider."

And Rush rested his head on his hands.

No one could suggest any method of declaring his mind which could be entertained for a moment. The tenants of Colonel North and Miss Fermor were sure of being turned out of their farms if they opened their lips against game and game laws. Rush was in the same predicament ; and his living would be probably forfeited

by any freedom of opinion on his part about this or any other new Act obtained by country gentlemen. The others present were tradesmen, partly dependent on the patronage of the two great houses in the neighbourhood.

"Well, I don't see," said the guard, "as to this speaking your minds,—how you are to manage it: but, as I say, I mind my own business"

"And this is your business, if it is anybody's," declared Tim Wells. "How are you to get your fees from Ludlam and other poulters in town, if the law works to prevent game being got?"

"Don't think I need to be told that, Tim. I know my own business. Never tell me there will be no game. Eh! Rush?"

"There will always be game," Rush declared. "While it is wanted and paid for, it will always be got, one way or another. The laws make no difference as to that. The gentry keep their game no better for any laws like this new one; and we will not be the worse for such."

"How will you manage that?"

"If they will not give us opportunity to speak out like men, and we have none to speak for us where the law-makers are all on one side, we must speak the only way we can. We must frighten these gentry."

"And the lady?" asked Tippet.

No one answered; for every man of them felt that there was something not very manly in threatening a woman; and one who could have no more to do with law-making than themselves.

Rush probably divined what was in the minds of his companions; for he observed, in an undertone, that Miss Fermor had more influence in sending the colonel to Parliament than almost any other person. It did not signify whether she had a vote or not. And as for this matter, she would come to no harm, and need not think of harm, if she did not set to work to send her neighbours to Botany Bay.

After much consultation, a measure was agreed on. The bell was rung, paper, pen and ink brought, and Rush, being the best penman present, began to write.—Some one proposed to let lawyer Bunney into the secret, for the advantage of a better style. But, though Rush believed Bunney would be sufficiently safe, he saw no particular occasion for referring to him now. They had sense enough among them to draw up a handbill.

"As I say," observed the guard, yawning, when a folded paper was held out to him by Rush, "—people must mind their own business,

as I mind mine. I have told you the law, as it was told to me”

“I knew it before,” said Rush.

“And you best know your own risks,” pursued the guard. “I mind my own business ; and that is to give the orders for the game.”

“And to get our handbill printed,” said Solomon Wells. “You know a safe fellow that will print it, do you ? ”

“That is my business,—trust me. You shall have it before this time on Thursday, depend upon it. Only do one of you be waiting when the mail comes up on Thursday, and see if I don’t know how to get the business done.”

“Address the parcel to me,” said Rush.

“Or to me,” interposed Tippet. “I am in slack work now, and I can undertake it.”

“Ay, Tippet : you are the fellow to distribute it,” said Rush. “You can get into all manner of places where a bigger man couldn’t.”

Tippet was not well pleased at this last remark : but Tim Wells set all right by observing that Tippet was so clever, he would keep out of scrapes where another man couldn’t.

Rush nodded all round, and went out ; and the rest dropped off, leaving the guard to hope that he had done his business pretty well, for this day.

CHAPTER II.

WISE IN CONCEIT.

ON the next Friday morning, Colonel North entered his breakfast room at the Hall, reading a handbill, which he threw down before the Rev. Mr. Dancaster, one of the party of guests now dispersed about the apartment,—some of whom were breakfasting,—some reading the newspapers,—some watching the weather.

“ You see,” observed the colonel to the clergyman.

“ This is horrible ! ” exclaimed the clergyman.

“ Nothing more than is expected from that sort of people by those who know them as well as I do,” said the colonel, beginning his breakfast.

Some few of the guests cast a look of inquiry towards the handbill. It circulated through the company. One had seen it yesterday : another had heard of it. After glancing at it, most returned to their newspaper or their breakfast.

The handbill was as follows :

“ TAKE NOTICE. We have lately heard and

seen that there is an Act passed, that whatever poacher is caught destroying the Game, is to be transported for Seven Years.

This is English liberty.

Now do we swear to each other, that the first of our company that this law is inflicted on, that there shall not one gentleman's seat in our country escape the rage of fire. We are nine in number; and we will burn every gentleman's house of note. The first that impeaches shall be shot. We have sworn not to impeach. You may think it a threat, but they will find it reality. The Game Laws were too severe before. The Lord of all men sent these animals for the peasant as well as the prince."

"This is horrible!" again exclaimed Mr. Dancaster. "What a state of society are we in!"

"You see," observed the colonel, "what notions of property exist among our neighbours. If we were to give way on one point,—about any one kind of property, you see how safe any other would be. The moment we effectually assert our right to our game, these fellows talk of burning our houses."

Some one wondered whether they would really do it. Two or three said that fellows desperate

enough to poach, and to send about such a hand-bill, would make no great difficulty of setting fire to a house. The colonel saw in some faces a desire to know what he meant to do. He helped himself to some cold pheasant at a side-table, rang the bell, and resumed his seat.

"I shall meet them with vigorous measures, of course," he said, "as every man of property is bound to do in such cases. Not that I think any house will be burned. But it must not be my fault"

Here the butler appeared, and was desired to send for the head gamekeeper immediately : when the colonel proceeded.

"It must not be my fault if any mischief is done,—if a partridge is shot through the insubordination of my neighbours. I shall meet them with vigorous measures."

"I think you are right there," said Lord A. "This is not a time to yield anything."

"I have no idea of yielding at any time," said the colonel. "There is nothing that we are called upon to yield. The law is clear, and must be upheld : for nobody would think, I suppose, of allowing the poor to choose what laws they will have and obey, and what shall be done away with at their desire."

"And if these nine men had their own way with the game," observed Lord A., "they might find themselves the worse. Besides the right that gentlemen have to their own sports and pleasures, supported by their own money, these pleasures are, in this instance, a great privilege to their poor neighbours."

"Why yes," observed Squire Dixon: "we should all find ourselves rather dull,—down to the village children,—if there was an end to sporting here. I agree with the colonel in enjoying the merry faces we meet when we are out coursing, and the pleased zeal of the farmers when they welcome us to our pheasant-shooting in their fields. On a brisk December day, out they come, smiling and proud, with their pork pies and strong ale;—I always feel that kind of mutual understanding very pleasant, and extremely good for the people."

"One of the prettiest sights," said Captain Collet, "is when the colonel drops a hare at a cottage door. One likes to think of the treat it is to the poor souls,—a hare smoking on their table."

"Ah!" said Lord A., "these peasants do not know their own interest when they set themselves against sporting arrangements."

"Why, as to the hare on the table," observed Mr. Sprechen, a lawyer of the neighbourhood who had come up to breakfast, "I doubt whether you would make much way with that argument, or get much gratitude for the gift. The question is whether the cottager waits for the savoury hare till the colonel drops one at his door. If he sees twenty hares sitting in the next field at sundown, or finds three or four taking a bite at his own little garden produce when he comes out in the morning, it is hardly likely that he will wait for a hare dinner till the colonel gives it him."

"Why, indeed," said the clergyman, "we can hardly wonder at his eating up that which he finds eating up him. But I hope . . . I should think . . ."

"That," said the colonel, "is an incidental matter. We have to wink at a few trifles of that sort, when we cannot prevent them. If there were nothing worse than that, no one would care. But every transgression leads on to something worse. Every man that has committed one such act of poaching as even that which you allude to is led on in guilt, till it comes to this,"—pointing to the handbill. "Wo be to them, if they begin with snaring hares in their own gardens, and end with disgusting gentlemen with

living in the country ! They would repent too late then.”

“ The continent being open now,” observed the young captain, “ and Paris and Vienna so attractive, these people would be wise to offer every inducement to their country gentlemen to live on their own estates.”

“ Poor wretches,” said Lord A, “ what should they know about Paris and Vienna ?”

“ They know perhaps that there is a world outside of their village ; and it might occur to them that their great neighbours will stay away and amuse themselves, if there is not game enough to leave them anything to do at home.”

“ It would be a pity,” observed the colonel, “ if they were to find this out first by seeing the house shut up, and the stables and kennels empty. It is very likely that they may not be able to value the advantage of the residence of the gentry till they lose it. But it is our business to take better care of them than they can take of themselves, and to stop the beginnings of mischief. On this ground, the smallest poaching offences ought to be strictly dealt with, for the culprit’s own sake, and that of his neighbours.”

“ And as for such an outbreak as this,” said Mr. Dancaster, “ you will, I hope, put forth all

your energy, Colonel North ;—meet boldly such a demonstration.”

“ Of course I shall. And it will be no very difficult matter. These nine, or any ninety-nine poachers may give us trouble and annoyance ; but they can be no match for us.”

“ I hope we shall find it so,” observed Mr. Sprechen ; “ but I was in a place last week where they have given such extreme trouble that they now carry matters pretty much their own way.”

“ That is scandalous !” exclaimed Mr. Dancaster. “ There is an end of all security,—of all uses of law and property,—where such violations of both are permitted.”

“ It could only happen,” said the colonel, finishing his breakfast, “ where the gentry and magistrates are not up to their duty.”

“ Are the magistrates supine, Mr. Sprechen, in the place you speak of ?” inquired Mr. Dancaster.

“ Why, I cannot say they are. They appear to be extremely anxious on the subject : but they do not know what course to take.”

“ Ah ! that is the way,” pronounced the colonel. “ Supineness is bad enough ; but there is something worse ; and that is the weak and offensive compassion, or timidity, or whatever you like to call it, which treats tenderly this species of theft

and trespass, and so allures men on to thoughts of burning down our houses. We discountenance here all such supineness and timidity."

"It is a singular fact," observed Mr. Sprechen, "that it is here, and not under a supine magistracy, that this handbill has come out."

"I do not see that," replied the colonel. "Under a supine magistracy, the poachers know they have not to dread the execution of the law. They can get what they want without threats."

The arrival of the head gamekeeper being announced, the colonel desired his guests to arrange the pleasures of the morning as they liked, telling them when and where he was going to ride, that any who pleased might accompany him. He took up the handbill, and went to speak to that trusty personage, Graham, the head of the game department.

As the colonel and his party were returning from their ride, they met Miss Fermor driving her pony phaeton, accompanied by her friend and domestic companion, Miss Wright. Miss Fermor eagerly greeted the party, and stopped to ask the colonel whether he had seen the handbill.

"Graham tells me," said the colonel, "that it was found this morning under every knocker in

the village and neighbourhood ; and passed under every door which had no knocker. The wretches are determined to give us full notice. No less than four of the bills were left on my premises."

"What ought one to do ?" asked Miss Fermor.

"If you mean to ask what I have done," replied the colonel, "I have taken good care that nobody can come up to fire my house, barns or stacks. I have ordered Graham to set spring-guns again. He is to have the notice boards repainted, and set up before to-morrow night."

"I did that once, by your advice, you know," said Miss Fermor, "and the boards all disappeared the first night."

"That is easily provided against," said the colonel. "Set your guns to guard your notice-boards, as well as your game, and they will not be touched. The fact spreads. Before night, every body will know how your boards are protected ; and they will not be touched. At least, that is what I am doing."

"And indeed," said Mr. Dancaster to the lady, "it seems to me quite right,—high time.. I was really never aware till this morning,—it seems to have burst upon me,—how necessary it is to use vigorous measures,—how wrong it is to be supine in such a state of things."

"Then," said Miss Fermor to the colonel, "I suppose I had better desire my people to act in concert with yours."

"By all means, if you think proper."

"I will desire Mitchelson to consult with Graham,—shall I?—and do whatever Graham does."

The matter was settled. The lady touched her ponies with the lash, received the gentlemen's bows, and drove on.

CHAPTER III.

MAN NOT BETTER THAN THE FOWLS.

“WHAT has happened to Jem, I wonder,” said Harriet Hayward to her sister Anne, on the afternoon of this day. “He has been whistling, these two hours, just as if he was merry.”

“And he told me to get some candles,” said Anne, “because he would be wanting to work in the shed after dark. Perhaps he has got a good job.”

“Why, that seems unlikely, at this season. I am afraid he is going to waste his paint and his time on another fancy signboard.”

“What a pity that is!” observed Anne. “I wish we could find something about the house that wants painting. I’ll look about, if you will give him a peep in the shed. There goes his whistle again!”

Harriet soon came running back with news that their brother had reason for his merry whistle. The colonel’s head-keeper had given him a good

job. He was to repaint the notice boards about the spring-guns. He would have to sit up all night, unless he called in the help of his rival over the way,—which he was resolved not to do. The boards must be up,—or as many as possible of them,—by daylight to-morrow, weather permitting.

“Now, I wish it may rain hard all to-morrow,” cried Anne;—“such rain as that nobody would think of putting fresh paint out of doors. Jem will wear himself out with the work, and sink as low as ever afterwards.”

As there was every prospect of a fine day to-morrow, however, the sisters prevailed on their brother to let them try to help him. He admitted them to the shed when the whole village was gone to rest; and he owned that they gave him no small assistance. Yet he turned them out in haste when Noyse the joiner called on him very early in the morning: though Noyse, who was soon to be married to Anne, would not have admired his betrothed the less for seeing her helping her brother.—So thought the sisters; but Noyse himself seemed to have no objection to their being dismissed.

It was not long before they heard Tippet’s voice and laugh in the shed; and then the three men went out together.

"I am glad," said Harriet, "that they have got Jem out for a mouthful of fresh air. I'll just step into the shed, and finish what I was about, while he is away."

But in this she was baffled. She could not find the large paint-pot, out of which she wanted some black paint. It had stood there, quite full, an hour ago; and now she could nowhere see it.

Jem Hayward was soon in higher spirits still; for, by breakfast-time he had received an order from Miss Fermor's gamekeepers for a large set of boards with "**MANTRAPS AND SPRING GUNS SET HERE,**" upon them. Between the putting up of the colonel's, and the preparation of Miss Fermor's boards, the village was busy all this day. Orders had been given that many hands should be employed, not only because the great proprietors were anxious to have the thing done, but because they wished every person in the district to know that they were in earnest,—that spring-guns were actually to be set, and, among other places, so as to protect the notice boards.

Everybody in the neighbourhood did know these facts. Nevertheless, just after midnight,—this very first night,—the boards were in course of being rendered useless. A noose of small cord was easily cast from the safe side of the hedge over the

top of the post, or branch of the tree, on which the board was fixed ; and this drew after it a stout rope, on which was tied a sack ;—the sack containing a boy, with a paint-pot and large brush. A handy little fellow had been selected, who could do what was wanted very quietly by starlight. By feeling the edges of the boards, he could paint well enough to deface ; and he enjoyed the fun of smearing the black paint over the letters which had been carefully described by Jem Hayward in the morning. His employers, hidden in the hedge, and still as mice, held him steady till he jerked the rope, and then let him down gently, and went on to another.

While thus holding him aloft, his comrades saw a little man come tripping along the causeway ; a man so very little that they knew, even by that dim light, that it could be no other than Tippet. One of them therefore ventured on a very low whistle, just as Tippet was passing. Tippet visibly started, and then inquired who was there. When he found it was only the inferior men,—only Gill and Barton, labourers, employed in the drudgery of poaching,—and that none of the leaders were present, he carried himself high ;—somewhat higher than the men liked : and they told him plainly that if, as they knew, he had been about the

country, leaving the handbill under doors and knockers, they would have him understand that they considered their work as good as his,—and his, indeed, more of a drudgery than theirs.

Tippet dispensed his “Pooh ! Poohs !” with great liberality, and was moving on, when the little painter aloft gave the sign to be pulled back into the hedge. Tippet could not refrain from watching the descent.

“A clever contrivance that,” said he. “It is just like my invention, that I named to Rush. Very clever !”

“Yes ; you see,” said Barton, “it carries the boy over the heads of the guns, as one may say ; so that no harm can happen to him. You see, nothing can go amiss with him.”

Yet, at this very moment, the rope caught or stuck, or somehow went wrong, so that the sack would not slide, and the boy called out, rather louder than was safe, that he should fall out of the sack,—that he was spilling the paint,—that it was all over him, and would suffocate him.

Barton and Gill pulled in vain. Tippet was making his way through the hedge, when they earnestly called him back, saying that there were guns to guard this very board. He knew it, he said. He had particularly marked and traced the

wires, and he could find his way safe over every inch of this nook of the field. And he did safely make his way to the post, turn the boy head uppermost, loosen the rope, and cause him to be landed, in a terrible mess, in the road.

"You be a bright one, after all," said Gill. "If you hadn't comed, the lad might have smothered; for we shouldn't have put foot on the other side of the hedge till daylight came."

"O, you may trust my knowledge of the ground," said Tippet. "But be off! We have made too much noise.—Never mind me! I'm coming."

The men hastened on, when, the next moment, they heard a shot, close at hand. By one impulse, they and the boy ran back to the gap they had just made. They heard a groan, too surely, they feared, from Tippet. They whispered first,—then called to him, more and more loudly; but obtained no reply. What to do next, they could not decide, till the approach of some keepers settled the matter for them. They could then only make their way home and to bed, as fast as possible, before the alarm should otherwise reach the village.

These men did not carry any weight on their minds, further than the sorrow which they felt, in

common with the whole neighbourhood, for Tippet's death. They had not asked him to cross the hedge, and had dissuaded him from doing so, and desired him to take care of himself. It was certainly some relief to them that no inquiry was made after them. Tippet, being found dead between the hedge and the smeared notice-board was supposed to be the agent in defacing the board. Of course, it was suggested that somebody must have carried away the vessel which had held the paint: but the paint-pot stood in its proper place in Hayward's shed before the news had got abroad; and the little boy had by that time left the village in the carrier's cart, on a visit to his uncle, twenty miles off. So Barton and Gill went to their work with minds no more uneasy, and faces no more shy than on many a morning after having relieved the neighbouring covers of some of their charge of game.

The shriek of the mother when the gamekeepers brought home the body of her only son,—the only relation she had in the world,—made their very hearts flinch, though they had borne coolly enough the groans and hootings they had encountered as they passed down the village street.

"How shocking it is that men will do such things!" observed Woodruffe to Graham;

"breaking hedges at night, and getting their deaths when they have a mother to maintain!"

"Carry him upstairs," said Graham, "and take care not to uncover his face again. 'Twas that that made the old woman shriek. Carry him up, and let us get away."

They were not long in getting away from the house; but they were haunted by what they had seen, and their ears rang with the sounds they had heard. Woodruffe's wife observed that he did not take to his breakfast this morning; and he replied by the remark—how shocking it was that men would do such things as go out at night and break hedges, when they had a mother at home to maintain. His wife stared; and he then added, that when he did such things he knew no better; and that though there was talk of spring-guns in those days, he very well knew there were none really set.

When the head-keeper was again summoned to the Hall, he supposed, and perhaps rather hoped, that it was to receive orders to set the guns no more. But he was mistaken. His master told him that this event proved that every possible defence of gentlemen's rights was more than ever necessary; that he, and the other keepers, ought to be glad and thankful to be saved the fatigue

and danger of incessant watchfulness over every part of the property ; and that there was little fear of mischief at present, as the village had received a pretty severe hint to let the game and the notice-boards alone.

“ How is the fellow’s mother left, do you know ? ”

“ She had only him to depend on, sir. But they say she will be well taken care of.”

“ Ah ! there is a sort of understanding among those people,” said the colonel, “ a point of honour to compensate one another for accidents. If you see anything that can be done for her, Graham, let me know.”

“ Yes, sir : but they say it is settled already. She is to be housekeeper, or something, to the Tyrrels at Lowridge farm.”

“ What, Tyrrel the tax collector ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; he that rents Lowridge farm under Miss Fermor. I don’t know what Miss Fermor will say to it.”

“ O ! she will not object. It is very natural that there should be a good feeling about the poor old woman : and she has done no harm that I know of. She has suffered enough for having a vicious son. I should not object, if Tyrrel was my tenant ; and I cannot conceive that Miss Fermor will.”

On the day of the funeral, the colonel and his friends were out riding where the toll of the church bell could not reach their ears. But the clergyman could not so escape. He saw it all:—the cessation of business throughout the village; the universal condolence with the mother; the presence of Farmer Tyrrel as a mourner,—his being the arm which supported the old woman; the concourse which filled the churchyard; the rush to the grave, to catch the last sight of the coffin; the quietude of the children, generally noisy on such occasions, but now kept in awe by the numbers present:—all these things he saw. He went through the service with unusual solemnity; and then, needing to utter his feelings, and knowing that the colonel's party were not at home, he went to Miss Fermor's.

"I have just been interring the poor fellow who was shot the other night," said he, as he took his seat beside the lady's work-table.

"Ah! shot by that unhappy spring-gun. We were shocked to hear of it. They tell me there is an old mother left; and my housekeeper speaks of her as a very respectable person. If I can be of any use, Mr. Dancaster"

And she took her purse out of her reticule.

"I do not think anything of that kind is

wanted. I believe,—indeed I am assured,—the poor woman is provided for; but”

“ O well ! But if not, you will of course come to me. You know I depend on you for such calls. I rely upon you, in these cases.”

“ Thank you ! I will certainly. But, Miss Fermor, I cannot tell you how impressed I have been by the scene of this morning.”

Miss Wright looked up from her work ; and Mr. Dancaster was induced, by her countenance, to address himself to her.

“ I certainly never before conceived of the state of society we are in. To see what I have seen this morning ;—the bereaved mother,—a man let down into the grave in the prime of life,—and the sort of feeling that I am confident exists among the people,—and all this about the game !”

“ But the man was trespassing, was he not ? ” asked Miss Fermor.

“ To be sure he was ; but what a penalty for a trespass ! It strikes me that there is no regular tribunal where a man would be doomed to death for a trespass.”

“ But this is according to law, is it not ? ” asked Miss Fermor. “ The colonel advised me to set spring-guns ; and I am sure he would not

do that if it was not all regular and right,—all according to law.”

“ To a compendious law, then,” observed Miss Wright, “ which saves the trouble of a regular tribunal, and makes Colonel North judge, jury and executioner at once.”

“ Just so ! ” cried Mr. Dancaster, eagerly.

“ You two will agree well,” said Miss Fermor. “ Miss Wright is always uneasy about my spring-guns. But I feel I cannot do wrong in following the colonel’s lead about such things. And you remember, Mr. Dancaster, how emphatically you supported what he said about its being my duty to set spring-guns.”

“ It is very true. I cannot deny it. I was impressed that morning by what I heard of the extent of poaching, and the prevalent vice of the people in breaking the laws, and violating the rights of their superiors. It seemed to me then that the first point, the first duty of everybody, was to uphold the laws : and ”

“ Well, surely, you must be right in that, Mr. Dancaster.”

“ Perhaps so : but I confess, after what I have seen this morning, I feel that the colonel must have more courage than I could boast of, if he keeps his spring-guns set and charged.”

"Is it quite certain," asked Miss Wright, "that to do so is lawful?"

"My dear!" exclaimed Miss Fermor, "can you suppose the colonel would do anything unlawful? You know he is in Parliament."

"Colonel North would hardly risk men's lives without making sure of his legal grounds," Mr. Dancaster declared. "But, as I said, I own I should not have courage, in his place, to run the risk of shooting another man in the same way."

"Or," said Miss Wright, "a woman stealing a pennyworth of sticks; or a child that has lost its way, gathering blackberries."

"My dear, how shocking!" exclaimed Miss Fermor. "But, Mr. Dancaster, do not you put spikes, or broken glass, or something, along the top of your walls, at the parsonage?"

"Yes: and this morning I did think of removing everything of that sort. But I don't see how anybody could possibly be fatally injured by either broken glass or those small spikes."

"And," said Miss Wright, "nobody could meet with any accident, on the top of your walls. Any one who came there must want to steal your orchard fruit, or garden vegetables, or fowls. And such a trespasser would have no right to complain if he cut his hands, or tore his clothes, or

his flesh. But these dreadful spring-guns are sure to shoot a person for a comparatively small offence, if they go off at all: and there are many chances that they may shoot an innocent person.”

“I remember now, I did hear when I was a child,” said Miss Fermor, “that one of Sir Charles Wilson’s gamekeepers was shot dead by a spring-gun, in his own walk, by tripping, and so falling over the wire, or something of that sort.—I will have all mine taken up, shall I? I will speak to Mitchelson about it to-day, shall I, Mr. Dancaster?”

“In your place I should certainly not be easy till it was done,” replied Mr. Dancaster. “After what I have seen this morning . . .”

“Shall I ring?” asked Miss Wright, with her hand on the bell. “Mitchelson may not be immediately within call; and the days are now so short . . .”

“Thank you!” said Miss Fermor; “I will speak to Mitchelson directly. And if the colonel should be surprised to find my spring-guns all taken up, I can tell him, you know, that I really have not courage to run any risks with them. And want of courage may be excused in a woman; may it not, Mr. Dancaster?”

CHAPTER. IV.

THE BEAM IN THE EYE.

"MITCHELSON," said Miss Fermor, as her head-gamekeeper entered the breakfast-room, soon after Mr. Dancaster's departure, "I want to speak to you about a very important thing. And therefore I speak to you myself, instead of through Mr. Blake."

Mitchelson bowed.

"I must have all our spring-guns taken up directly. I really cannot run the risk of having anybody shot on my grounds."

"Very well, madam."

"You can have them all up to-night, can you?"

"There will be no difficulty about that, madam. They are not set for the night yet : and it is only not to set them,—that's all."

"Well : make all safe, so that there may be no danger to anybody. I will never have any spring-guns set in my grounds again."

"And what would you wish done about the

boards, madam,—the Notice boards ? They were all put up yesterday.”

“ Why, I had not thought of that.—I should think they may as well stay where they are. They may prevent people coming to trespass : and that would be very well. What do you think ? ” she inquired of Miss Wright.

“ Why, as it is not true that ”

“ But it was true, as everybody knows, when the boards were put up.”

“ Yes : but I think some one might venture in, as poor Tippet did, in spite of the notice ; and when once it is found that no guns are there, I should be afraid that the people might be led not to believe any such notices, and so might get shot on Colonel North’s, or some other estate, where guns really are set.”

“ O ! that would never do,” declared Miss Fermor. “ We must have the notices all taken down, Mitchelson.”

“ Very well, madam.”

His mistress having apparently finished her orders, the gamekeeper glanced behind him, to make sure that the door was shut, drew somewhat nearer to the work-table, and said that he had a little matter of business to speak about.

“ Let us hear,” said Miss Fermor.

"Shall I go away?" asked Miss Wright.

Mitchelson looked as if he hoped she would; but Miss Fermor said

"By no means, my dear. There can be no business of mine that need be any secret from you. And besides, I may want your opinion."

"It is about Ludlam, the poult erer, madam."

"The London poult erer," Miss Fermor explained to Miss Wright, "who supplies us with fish when we are here, and with poultry and fish when we are in town; and with game at a pinch, you know."

"Ludlam says, by the mail guard, madam, that he has a pressing want of game for Lord Mayor's day; and that he shall want plenty all the season."

"Well!"

"And he thinks, madam, we might perhaps come to some agreement about it."

"O! I remember something of the sort happening before."

"Yes, madam: it is a very common thing."

"What is a common thing?" asked Miss Wright..

"Why, ma'am, for gentlemen that have more game than they want to agree with the London poult erers for their mutual advantage:—to let the

poulterers have so much game, and take it out in fish and poultry, and whatever they want.”

“ It is very convenient,” observed Miss Fermor: “ only that really the poulterers do take their advantage so shamelessly! They charge so high for everything! That is the worst of it.”

“ But,” said Miss Wright, “ I thought it was against the law to sell game.”

“ It is not selling game, my dear. We exchange for mutual advantage, that is all.”

Miss Wright was silent.

“ It is not exactly according to law,” the game-keeper admitted. “ But that cannot be helped, you see. Gentlemen must have game at their tables; and what is wanted must be had.”

“ What does the colonel think of it, Mitchelson, do you know?” asked his lady.

“ Colonel North knows as well as I do, madam, that it is a thing constantly done.”

“ By gentlemen in this neighbourhood?”

“ O yes! There was Squire Venn, the other day, to my knowledge. He made a bargain with the carrier for the season, about disposing of his game, and then went straight into court to try Will Bennet for poaching.”

“ That is very curious,” observed Miss Fermor.

“ Very,” agreed Miss Wright;—“ a magistrate

going from breaking the law to punish an uneducated man for law breaking!"

"The law goes but a little way," observed the keeper, "when people must have game,—when Lord Mayor's Day is coming on, and such times.—And if we are to have no guns, we may as well make some advantage of our game as lose it. The poachers are beginning hard, this year."

"How do you mean?"

"They have got into the habit; and it is very profitable to them, with the London dealers. And their spirit is up, the more the colonel's is up. I doubt whether they don't beat us in numbers now."

"What, my people and the colonel's together?"

"They beat us and the colonel's together, and the help we have to depend on too. At least, so I believe it will turn out. And we may test that almost any night now. There will be many a scuffling night this winter, we all expect."

"In that case," said his mistress, "we may as well have the advantage of our own game as have it stolen. So you may make the best bargain you can with this London man—What is his name?"

"Ludlam, madam."

The lady set down the name in her tablets, and continued,

"I shall expect to be supplied with fish till I go up to town after Christmas ; and then with fish and poultry ; and with game, when I am disappointed of any from home. You understand."

"That is well," observed the lady complacently, as Mitchelson went out. "My game is such a trouble and anxiety and expense, it is well to have an opportunity of turning it to some purpose. It is more trouble and expense than it is worth, as I often say."

"I am quite of your opinion," said Miss Wright.

"Are you, my dear ? I am delighted to hear you say so. You seemed to have taken a silent fit ; and I was afraid you did not agree with us."

"I was thinking what a pity it is to have to keep up such a head of game, when it costs you so much anxiety and expense, and tempts you to break the law to make the only use you can of it."

"O ! I don't think much of that when it is what everybody does. And London poulters must have game, you know ; and if we don't supply them, the poachers will : so it is in fact helping to keep the law, to supply them.—But, my dear, I have no choice about preserving my game. What would my nephew say, when he comes into the estate, if he found the game all let down ?"

" Could he not restock it, if he wished it?"

" It would be an ungracious thing to make him do so. And besides, it is the only inducement I have to offer him to come down, when he has a leave. And it would be ungracious to my neighbours to give up my preserves, while my game can afford them any pleasure. And what would Mitchelson and the other keepers do, if their places were taken from them? And then, as the colonel says, the most natural way of holding poachers in awe is for them to see qualified persons sporting in all proper places. And my estate is a proper place."

" How is it that your nephew is qualified? I forget, or never heard."

" Ah! that is a curious case. He is of a poor family; and yet he is qualified. My poor sister, you know, married a good deal below our ideas. But Frank's father is a squire, though his estate falls a little below £100 a year; and he, of course, is not qualified. But Frank himself is qualified, as the eldest son of a squire."

" Ah! I remember. And I might have remembered by the oddity of the fact."

" It would be odd if I forgot any circumstance in the whole affair," observed Miss Fermor. " I have enough to make me remember it, I'm sure.

Every pheasant brought in costs me a guinea. And I have no peace in the shooting season, for fear of accidents. I am obliged to keep my house to myself, for a week or two now and then, as I am doing now, to recover my nerves. And it seems as if I was to have no rest,—if we really are to suffer from poachers, night and day, this winter.”

“ It seems an expensive luxury indeed, in every way,—the keeping up a large head of game.”

“ And that is not all: but the rest I turn over to Blake. I tell him there is no use in my having a steward if I am to be troubled with the complaints of the tenants. When I open my letters, if I find any complaining of the injury to the tenants’ crops from my game, I hand them over to Blake, and tell him he must see whether it is true; and if it is, he must make proper allowance in the rents.”

“ And he does so?”

“ O! I suppose so. Of course, if such are my orders.”

“ And so as to satisfy the tenants?”

“ My dear, you know little of tenants if you think they are ever satisfied. They are grumblers, born and bred; and especially about the game. They cannot have so little reason to be satisfied

as I have ; for I am terribly out of pocket in my rents.”

“ And without satisfaction to anybody.”

“ Except, my dear, the satisfaction we ought never to lose sight of,—the satisfaction of doing one’s duty. As a landed proprietor, one owes duties to society ; and I hope I shall never repine in the discharge of mine.—My dear,” after a pause, “ how silent you are ! What are you thinking of?”

“ I was thinking whether it is not a duty to society for the rich to observe the law,—and especially in those matters in which they most insist on the poor doing so.—I know that when the poacher sells your pheasants, he has first stolen them, and then illegally sells them : but really, I do not see how he can be called to account with any grace, if you and the magistrate have both broken the law by selling game.—You know, in the eye of the law, it does not matter whether Ludlam pays you in gold and silver or in fish and poultry.”

“ You think I am not doing my duty to society in making this bargain with Ludlam ? Dear me ! one never knows what to do. I hate to trouble the colonel so often ; but I think I must consult him, just this once. What do you think he will say ?”

"I can have no doubt about that."

"You think he would not make such a bargain as mine with Ludlam?"

"I am confident that nothing would induce Colonel North to sell a single head of game."

"I will write him a note, and tell him everything; and then I shall know what to do."

"And I will stop Mitchelson's proceedings till you have made up your mind,—shall I?" said Miss Wright, with her hand on the bell.

"Wait a little, my dear: do not let us be hasty. Let me write my note first, and then we will see."

In a few moments, Miss Wright said, "I dislike troubling you, Miss Fermor, as much as you hate troubling Colonel North; but it occurs to me,—is it quite prudent to commit to paper your plan of doing what is illegal? Accidents may happen; and it will be as well not to let such a purpose stand in black and white. And without need of such risk; for I am confident the matter will end in your not selling your game."

"How perplexing it is!" cried Miss Fermor, putting down her silver pen. "One does not know which way to turn one's self."

"Colonel North is always ready to give you his best advice," said Miss Wright. "If we could

meet him on his return from his ride, a few words might settle it all, before Mitchelson has taken any steps."

"Then we will order the pony phaeton, my dear, and not come home till we have seen the colonel."

CHAPTER V.

CUNNING AS FOXES.

THERE was abundance of game at the Lord Mayor's dinner, this year, as every year. Though the law was absolute, in those days, against the selling of game on any pretence whatever, and though the killing of game was a narrowly restricted power, there was always game to be bought; and the killers in fact were an army compared with the killers by law. The violation of the law had become so extensive, so almost universal, that nobody thought of enforcing it on society in general. The stewards and butlers of London gentlemen procured game from poulters by the very stringent compulsion which was in their power,—withdrawing their custom from poulters who hesitated about supplying game. Mail-guards carried orders into the country; higgler made wholesale bargains in village public houses; carriers conveyed waggon loads of game to town; poulters sold it,—the best to gentle-

men's servants ; the damaged or the stale to street hawkers. Members of parliament, lords and ladies of manors, and needy squires, here and there, made private contracts for the sale of their hares and partridges : and there were gamekeepers here and there who robbed their masters of property which they knew would never be missed.—Amidst a system of such extensive law-breaking, it was not to be expected that the ignorant and the poor should refrain from grasping at their share of the profitable transgression : or wondered at that this should be done by some who were not poor or ignorant, but who felt themselves injured in purse and rights by the game which seemed given over to be a common prey. It is true, the village poacher added to the sin of theft committed by the dishonest gamekeeper, that of trespass : but then, he pleaded to himself that he had sore grievances which the other parties had not : and these grievances were easily erected into a justification, by himself and his neighbours, in relation to laws which were in other respects broken by everybody. The farmer whose wheat and green crops fed the squire's game, and the cottager whose garden produce was eaten up by them, were in no moral condition to resist the solicitations of London poulters, the facilities of the

carrier's cart, and the prices which glittered in the hand of mail guard or higgler.

Amidst all this demand and irregular supply, what resource of regular supply was there?

None whatever but gifts from qualified killers of game. And these qualified men were only such as had a landed inheritance amounting to one hundred pounds a year; or a life interest in land to the amount of one hundred and fifty pounds a year: eldest sons of men of rank, down to esquires inclusive; and persons (game-keepers and others) authorised to kill game under the hand and seal of a lord or lady of a manor yielding not less than one hundred pounds a year. By the hands of such only could that game be now legally provided, (—and it must be gratuitously,—) which had become indispensable at all feasts in the season, in city or country.— And while such were the necessity, the temptations, the provocations, and the general prevalence of illegality, the only parties punished were the rural poachers,—unless it were some tattered Irish hawker in town, disposing to the poor of birds too much mangled for gentlemen's tables, or hares which would not keep another day. This partial administration of the law did not mend the tempers and morals of the subjects of its

discipline. Seeing and feeling, like most other people, that poaching was inevitable, they put their energies into it, and carried their transgressions to such a point throughout the kingdom that the game interest,—then, as ever, powerful in Parliament,—procured in 1816, that Act by which the penalty of transportation for not less than seven years was imposed on all who should be found trespassing, armed or unarmed, on any ground, open or inclosed, with the means or intent to destroy game: any and all persons whatsoever being empowered by the Act to seize such trespassers.

This Act caused so much exasperation in some, and such disapprobation in the general public, that it was repealed in the following year,—to be, however, re-enacted with the single difference that the being armed with an offensive weapon should be a condition of the penalty. It was in the interval between the passing of these two Acts that the feelings of one gang of poachers were expressed in the handbill which threatened to burn down gentlemen's houses: and, in that season poaching generally assumed a character of daring and violence which alarmed moderate men, whether personally interested or not in the preservation of game. By such, some abortive

attempts were made, in ensuing sessions of Parliament, to procure a partial legalisation of the sale of game. But even this concession was refused, as long as possible, by the country gentlemen who held game-law making in their hands: and it was not till 1831 that the buying and selling of game was permitted by law.

The table at Guildhall was rich in game this year, as we have said: and so were all the tables for which Ludlam was caterer. Colonel North did his utmost in defence of his rights, and induced Miss Fermor and Lord A. to emulate much that he did. They both declined the responsibility of setting spring-guns, and any man-traps but those called humane: but they doubled their staff of gamekeepers, and had frequent watch kept by hired assistants. But all was in vain. Not a man was shot, after poor Tippet; nor so much as a leg caught in any trap, humane or inhuman. The poachers seemed to go harmless and invisible. Now and then they were heard, afar off; and the game disappeared to such an extent as to prove their activity: but their impunity indicated that there was a strong local sentiment in their favor, reconnoitring the spring-guns, removing the man-traps, and misleading the keepers. Even very

respectable men were supine, as the colonel called it. Tyrrel, the tax-collector, who held a good farm under Miss Fermor, could not be roused this winter to give any aid. He was not a man to whom hire could be offered for reinforcing the keepers in their watch. The colonel hoped that his own presence in the woods with his men would induce Tyrrel, who was young and strong, to offer his services for a night; now and then : but it did not. Tyrrel spoke of nothing but business when they met ; and when once fairly asked to join the adventure for a night, declined, saying that he wished everybody would bide at home at night, as he did, and then things would go better in the day.

Early one Sunday morning, when Gill, who worked for Tyrrel, was foddering the cattle, his master came up to him, and asked whether he was going to church that day.

“ Yes, sure,” replied Gill. “ I always does.”

“ Then you can do something for us. You can have a chat with some of our people. You know what I mean. I will speak to the Wells lads and Rush. You can tell the two Crofts and Noyse.”

“ And Barton, you know, sir, and Hayward.”

"What is Black about, do you know?"

"Why; I know he does not half like the way his affairs are going. The colonel's pay for watching does not make up to him for what he loses in his tailoring. Since he went to watch with the keepers, a wonderful number of the wives hereabouts have found that they can make and mend at home. And then, he sees new Sunday coats all through the place, come from a distance, this winter. And he fancies young Mr. Sprechen looks cold upon him; and the doctor has not given him a job, he doesn't know when."

"He had better come over to us."

Gill nodded, and said that day might come.

"Well; get what men you can. We think of a night at the colonel's or Miss Fermor's."

"What night, sir?"

"Ahem!" replied Tyrrel; and at the moment, Gill's step-son, Jack Foote, appeared at the gate, and nothing more could be said. Jack was only seventeen. He was not very wise; but he was a simple-minded, well-disposed lad; and Gill loved him much;—chiefly perhaps for his mother's sake: but also for his own. Tyrrel was considerate enough not to involve the lad in the knowledge of the enterprise.

That afternoon, Gill, on meeting his employer, gave him a nod which told that his errand was done. From that time till the next Thursday, he never had an opportunity of speaking further to him, or of learning what night was fixed for the adventure. Jack Foote was always in the way, or Jack's crony, Ben Lacy. Tyrrel might have made plenty of opportunities, but Gill could not. Tyrrel spoke to him only when his step-son was within ear shot.

As tax-collector, Mr. Tyrrel had to ride over the country a good deal; and he was particular about his horse. He let no one meddle with his stable but Gill, Jack and himself. On the next Thursday, about three in the afternoon, he ordered Gill to saddle his horse; and presently, he came to the stable to mount.

"You will be ready for to-night," he said to Gill.

"For to-night!" exclaimed Gill; and then he looked out at the door, in the fear that he had spoken too loud.

"There is nobody near," said Tyrrel. "I have sent Jack and Ben an errand across the country which will keep them, as I told them, till morning."

"Thank you, Sir; but those lads are fond of moonlight to come home by."

"They cannot walk there and back by lock-up time.—Do you come up about nine; and just walk in quietly."

"Shall I give notice to Noyse, or any of them?"

"They all know—You have only to come at nine."

"He might have trusted me a little further," thought Gill, as Tyrrel rode away. "They seem to have settled it all without letting me be in it,—even to sending round word of the night and the hour. 'Tis not altogether handsome, after I worked seven years for the old man, and now some time for his son. However, I have only to come when I'm bid, and follow the rest, and be glad of my money, when I get it. And it is thoughtful of him to send Jack out of the way of mischief."

CHAPTER VI.

HARMFUL AS KITES.

GILL was the first who entered the kitchen at Tyrrel's. At the best end of it were Mrs. Tyrrel, with her baby in her arms, and Mrs. Tippet, who was knitting in silence. Gill sat down on the settle near the fire, as he was told. But nobody spoke; and Mrs. Tippet sighed, almost every minute; and Mrs. Tyrrel had such an anxious countenance that Gill did not like to look that way. When the clock struck nine, he started so that he was ashamed of himself; and then, unable to bear the constraint any longer, he said he would go and see who was coming.

In the fore-court, he met Jack Foote, who asked him whether Tyrrel was home yet.

"No," said Gill. "Is that Ben with you? How come you back?"

"Yes. I'm Ben. We got a cast all the way back."

"Then you two go down, there 's good lads, to the Rampant Horse, and tell Lane that the two

sucking pigs master promised him will be sent on Saturday."

"What, down to the Rampant Horse at this time of night! We are tired and hungry."

"I dare say: but I'll tell you all about it when you come back. Be off, there 's good lads!"

And off they went.

Then Gill ran down to warn the two Crofts not to say a word to Jack or Ben of this expedition, if they should chance to meet.—The Crofts were out. He returned to Tyrrel's kitchen: and there he now found Tim and Solomon Wells, each having a gun. Next arrived Barton and Noyse, each with a gun. Then Hayward, with a bludgeon.—Hayward related that he had seen Jack and Ben within sight of the house; and that he had therefore gone on past the farm, and then returned; and that this had made him late. Gill said that he had disposed of the lads for a good three-quarters of an hour, if Mr. Tyrrel would but make haste, and let them get off.

It was not Mr. Tyrrel who next appeared; but three whose entrance caused a partial surprise: Mrs. Tyrrel, however, evidently expected them. They were lawyer Bunney, the doctor, and young Mr. Sprechen, the son and future partner of the colonel's friend.

The clock struck ten.—Soon after, some thought they heard a horse down at the stable. Gill was hastening to see, when in the doorway he met his master.

“ How d’ye do, gentlemen ? ” said Tyrrel to the whole company, as he approached the table, on which he laid some powder and shot. Mrs. Tippet looked, through her spectacles, at what was laid down ; and then her hands trembled so that she could not knit. She rose, and walked feebly to a door near her seat. Tyrrel’s eye followed her as she went out.

“ Here are about sixty charges, gentlemen,” said he.

“ Have you brought any flints ? ” asked Noyse, advancing to the table.

“ Yes ; I can accommodate you with some.” And he took a supply of flints from his pocket, and laid them beside the powder and shot.

Lawyer Bunney held out his hand for Noyse’s gun, and fitted it with a flint. All who had guns then came and took flints, and supplied themselves with powder and shot.—Meantime Gill was anxious about Jack, and had gone out to see if the lads were anywhere about. In the orchard, he met with farmer Rush and the two Crofts, and sent them in.—When he followed, he found that

four more men had arrived, and that one of the Crofts had so blacked his upper lip and whiskers as to make everybody laugh at his fierce aspect.

"That is a good disguise, though," observed the doctor.

"And easily got rid of," said young Sprechen.

"Come,—I'll make you a set of fierce fellows," cried lawyer Bunney. "Tyrrel, give me a cork or two, will you?"

Tyrrel took up a candle, and went into the parlour, to look for a cork in the cupboard. Bunney followed him, and called in the men, one by one, to be whiskered. A peal of laughter followed each feat: and the whole party were now in the parlour, except Mrs. Tyrrel.

"So much for the black! now for the white," said Bunney. "You must be whitened somewhere, that you may know friends from foes."

"The keepers," said farmer Rush, "have a white tape or handkerchief tied round the left arm."

"Then," said Barton, "if we does the likes, they wun't shoot no one on us."

"But you'll be shooting one another, Barton; and that will never do. No,—I'll chalk your hats. I'll give you smart hats, fit for a play."

"Mine's an old un enough," said Barton, sheepishly.

"All right! Men wear their worst on winter nights. Give it me! Here's a bit of chalk. Now see!"

And Bunney chalked a star in the front of the old hat,—with C. N. on each side, for Colonel North.—All handed in their hats to be chalked. Tyrrel's was the last.

"I'll put something grander on yours, Tyrrel;—something that will show you are the leader."

And he chalked a king's crown on the front of Tyrrel's hat.

"Now," said Tyrrel, "here is a double-barrelled gun. The best shot of this company shall have it."

All agreed that Solomon Wells was the best shot. The gun was handed to him. He received it with a mock bow, and gave his own over to Gill.

"Come gentlemen," said Tyrrel, "it is time we were off."

"I think so," said Gill, as the clock now struck eleven.

"My opinion is," observed Hayward, "that we ought to take an oath, before we leave this place, not to peach on each other."

"No, no," cried Gill. "Let's be off. There's nobody thinking of peaching."

The general opinion however was in favour of such an oath being taken.

"One of these lawyer gentlemen must swear us," said Rush, looking from Bunney to Sprechen.

"I'll swear you, three at a time," declared Bunney, looking round. "It won't take five minutes, Gill."

He ran into the kitchen, which Mrs. Tyrrel was just leaving. He asked her to hold her candle to him for a moment, while he found a Testament.

"'The Young Man's Best Companion,'" he muttered to himself. "That will do,—not to waste time."

"That is an account-book, Mr. Bunney," said Mrs. Tyrrel.

"The very book I want," cried he, running off with it.

On returning to the parlour, he held out the book by one corner, making three of the party hold by the other corners, and kiss the book when he had said the words,

"You 'll not peach upon each other, so help you God!"

The fourteen were sworn in five batches; and it was done in seven minutes.

"Now, then!" said Tyrrel.

The first man that put his head out drew back, saying that Jack Foote and Ben Lacy were there.

"I knew it would end so," said Gill.

"It must end in their going with us," decided Tyrrel. "They have seen enough to put them into danger, (unless they peach, which they must not do :) and they may as well share the advantage. I will take care that they shall, Gill ; though they are rather young hands, and can't help us much."

"Thank you, Sir," said Gill, with a heavy heart.

The lads were brought in, whiskered, chalked and sworn in a trice. Bunney laughed aside with the doctor at Jack's awe-struck countenance when he kissed the book, observing that the boy never looked graver at church. And the lawyer and doctor giggled together over the title-page of the account-book.

"Hush ! they will think us very profane," said the doctor. "What is Sprechen about ?"

"I want to see them in line," said Sprechen. "Don't they look like soldiers ?"

"Like soldiers on the stage," the doctor agreed. And sixteen was as large a regiment as could be expected on a country stage.

At last they set off, issuing from Tyrrel's back door at half-past eleven. They entered Miss

Fermor's manor first, and there met with no opposition. Two or three hares were obtained: but the main booty was in pheasants. Scarcely a shot missed; for the birds could be seen in the leafless trees, against the sky, like balls, presenting an easy mark. Some of the party would have been satisfied to go no further; but their leader was bent on a visit to the colonel's woods, and led the way there somewhat impatiently. Gill shot, and saw the bird fall from a tree, on a small farm that they passed, and was stepping over the fence to pick up the bird when Tyrrel desired him to come on.

"In a moment, Sir."

"That is a garden: don't go in there."

"Only just to fetch the bird, Sir. It is a matter of five shillings, Sir, to throw away,—besides its being evidence to-morrow, if it is left."

Gill possessed himself of the bird, and did not injure the garden: but some feathers lay under the tree which did as much harm as evidence as the dead bird could have done.

After passing some way along a lane, they made a short cut through farmer Tilleray's yard. For an instant they paused, on the dog barking: but some one said it was behind the house. Two or three next agreed that they had seen the figure of

a man, in the shadow of the house, and they thought the person had hidden himself about the sheds. Was it one of their own party turning craven? or a foe? They counted their party, and found sixteen complete; whereupon Rush declared aloud,

“If any of our party runs, I will blow his leg or his arm off.” To which there was no reply.

When the party reached the Bat green, one told the leader that there were certainly some men,—no doubt keepers,—standing near the wicket-gate of the Dairy wood.

“So much the better,” said Tyrrel. “They may follow us, if they please, to Thorngrove; for that is where we are going.”

And he led the way through the shaded part of Bat green, on the greater part of which the moonlight was now lying brightly, to the gate which opened upon Thorngrove. There he encouraged the sport, even more than before he knew the keepers to be within hearing. There was a whisper that some keepers were in an alley to the left of the gate: but not the less did the party move up the main ride, popping off shot after shot, and going among the trees after the fluttering birds.

When they came near the second turn to the

left, Henry Croft told Tyrrel that he saw a man peeping round the corner, with his body bent.

“Let him peep!” said Tyrrel. “We can much better peep at him, for the moon shines full down that walk, while we are in shade. But we may as well form. You stand by my right hand, and be firm; and”

Here Gill ranged himself on the left, and the others drew up close, in two lines, behind the three front men. They wheeled into view of the side walk, keeping in the main ride, and saw that a foe was indeed awaiting them. Two men faced them, backed by a few more. A single shot was fired on the side of the poachers; but whether at bird or man nobody knew, or would afterwards tell. One of the two front keepers then stood out in the moonlight, flourishing a stick, and shouting,

“Huzza, my boys! Fight like men!”

The comrade who had stood beside him, now stepped into his place. It was Woodruffe: and the one who shouted was Graham. Both retreated a little, and the poachers advanced quietly and steadily. Graham and Woodruffe knew that seven of their companions, all of whom carried sticks, but no guns, were drawing up close at their heels; and that ten more must be coming on in the rear of the poachers.—But the poachers also became

presently aware of this. A second shot was fired, certainly by one of the three front men. It took effect on Woodruffe, who sank down, doubled himself up, rolled on his left side, gasped twice, and moved no more.

A third shot was fired, which wounded Graham in the thigh. The poachers then rushed forwards, and became intermixed with the keepers. There was a rattle of sticks and guns, and many blows struck ; and, in a few seconds, a cluster of shots,—five or six.—Then the keepers gave way. Some fell, with groans and cries,—some hid behind the trees—some fled in any direction that seemed safest. Two stood their ground. The poachers held together,—passed over the bodies of Woodruffe and the wounded keepers, and took their way down the main ride. As they went, one cried out “Glory ! glory !” but was silenced by many saying “Whisht !” And the silence was unbroken till Gill picked up the butt of a gun in the Bat green, and asked whose it was.—Henry Croft said it belonged to him, but had been carried by another man.—This bit of conversation seemed to loosen Tyrrel’s tongue. Not a sound had hitherto been heard from him since he stepped over Woodruffe’s body : but at last he spoke.

"Now," said he, "Tom Tippet's debts are paid."

He led the way cheerily across the Bat green through the Dairy-wood, to the Cow-grass,—a steep slope, where the party did not keep the path, but made a short cut to a stream, leaving traces which were carefully followed up the next morning. At the stream, the party washed the black off their faces, and brushed the white out of their hats, and then went on.

On entering a field near to the point where they were to separate, Tyrrel's voice was heard crying "halt!" When all stopped, he said,

"We must not tell the dearest friend on earth: for there are two or three dead. We must come to an oath again."

They joined hands, and vowed they would never peach on one another, so help them God!

Tyrrel then told them that all would be hanged, without mercy, if it was found out.

"I thought it had been seven years' transportation," said Barton. "I heard nought of hanging."

"Whisht!" said some again; while one told Barton, in a low voice, that it would be as he said for the poaching: but this present case would be made murder.

Again, a dead silence ensued.

At every turn now, one or more dropped off

homewards.—When only five were left, there was some whispering.

“What’s that about?” asked Tyrrel.

Gill said that the Wells lads wanted him to take their guns home with him: and he was willing, only that he had not any very safe stowing place for such things.

“Put them in the straw in my cow-house,” said Tyrrel. “Go round and do it now.”

Tim and Solomon Wells disappeared; and there remained only Tyrrel, Gill and Jack, and Ben Lacy.

“Now,” said Tyrrel, “do you go round by the cow-house, home.—No:—I’m going to Bunney’s,—just for a minute,—that he and the doctor and young Sprechen may be able to say I was with them at this hour. I shall get home by one or soon after, as it is. Good night!”

And he walked away rapidly in the direction of Bunney’s house.

Gill and his young companions hardly spoke a word, though they had a considerable way to go round.—By the light of the stable lantern, they hid the guns carefully in the straw, and then they stole home. The clock struck one just after Gill was in bed: and he lay, sleepless and chilly, hearing the striking of every hour till it was time to be up and looking after the cattle at Tyrrel’s.

CHAPTER VII.

FOLLOWING WAR WITH ALL MEN.

THE next day, Friday, was a heavy and a dreary day to everybody. Though everybody was busy, in one way or another, about the affair of the preceding night, there was a stealthy air about each separate proceeding, a want of communication and confidence which gave an impression of hush and stillness, most unnatural after such an event as Woodruffe's death, and the wounding of many men whom everybody knew. If the mischief had been done by lightning or a flood, or if it had been murder by a stranger, or by some bad member of society in the village, there would have been the comfort of sympathy and complaint, and of joint exertion: but in this case, every man distrusted his neighbour; and each group of silently busy people seemed to be trying to circumvent and detect some other. It was a strange and even fearful thing to see the working men of the neighbourhood all about their work, as usual, neither

speaking of the murder which was exciting the whole country round, as fast as the tidings could spread; nor offering the slightest attempt to discover the murderers. This spectacle suggested to the gentlemen who rode through the village the chilling thought that this was just the state of society in which, if their houses should be fired, as threatened, in consequence of the proceedings they were taking, no neighbour would lend a hand to put out the flames.

After the appearance of the hand-bill, the colonel had privately had his fire-engines put in order. This morning, he was irresistibly impressed by the foreboding that, in case of fire, there would be nobody but his own and Miss Fermor's servants to work them.—He was in for the whole struggle now, however. He had pledged himself inextricably to the maintenance of his game-rights at all hazards: and he must carry the matter through. Nor was he troubled with a moment's doubt as to his course, past, present or future. Taking his stand on the law, and the rights of property, and not suspecting that he could possibly have misunderstood or exceeded the law in any one particular, he carried himself this day with the air and consciousness of a man charged with a great public duty in the avenging of his private wrongs.

He had first sent an express to London to desire the immediate presence of a Bow-street officer: had then communicated with the coroner about the inquest on Woodruffe's body; and had made arrangements with Lord A.'s head keeper (his own being wounded, and in no condition for business) to have every man in the village watched this day who was not unquestionably in the interest of the game-preservers. He visited each of the wounded keepers, speaking to them without witnesses. One of these, and only one, threw a ray of light on the question who the poachers were. He declared his strong persuasion that one of those who stepped over him after he fell was farmer Tyrrel. The colonel could hardly think this possible: but Newson was firm in his belief, though, as he said, he could not take his oath of it.

Perhaps it was in consequence of this that some spying began in the village, while the colonel was sitting down to breakfast, and saying to his guests (for he always had guests when himself at the Hall) that as poor Woodruffe was killed in his service and on his property, he should feel it his duty to pursue the offenders with the utmost vigour. That, he felt, was as clearly obligatory on him as to maintain Woodruffe's widow and

fatherless children, and supply means of recovery to the five wounded keepers.—One inexperienced and ill-bred guest having observed that such obligations were very onerous, and that a sporting gentleman ought to be blessed with fine resources who bound himself to such generous deeds, the colonel checked him by the remark that there was no generosity in the case, it being the barest matter of duty for a man to take care of his servants.

“Yes, certainly,” replied the young man, who had the misfortune to think his low thoughts aloud. “I see that: but it is a costly affair for you,—the doctoring these five men, and maintaining the widow and children, and bearing the expenses of the prosecution, and so on: and all in addition to your great outlay for the game, and the preserving it.”

“It cannot be helped,” said the colonel. “One cannot admit that sort of consideration.”

“And Mr. Bullen is not aware,” observed Mr. Sprechen, who had been sent for early this morning, “how small such collateral expenses are in comparison with the original cost of game-keeping. Why, Mr. Bullen, the colonel could tell you that his bill for barley alone for his pheasants last year was £800. For mere barley for his pheasants, Sir.”

"Do let us talk of something else," said the colonel. "You have not seen that widow this morning, as I have; nor my wounded servants, or you would not talk of expenses in such a business.—Sprechen, a word with you in the gun-room, when it suits your convenience."

While this was going on at the colonel's, Sam Bicket, a little shopkeeper in the village, came up to Tyrrel's, about some potatoes. He met Gill in the forecourt, and asked him whether he had heard of the affair in Thorngrove last night. Gill replied that he had heard there had been a scuffle, but knew no more.—Bicket told him there was one man killed and eight wounded; and then they agreed that it was a very shocking thing.—At this moment, Tyrrel was seen coming out of the house, with the key of the stable in his hand, and Bicket hastened to him, to speak about the potatoes. Of course, his news of one killed and eight wounded soon came out; and Tyrrel observed in reply, "They should bide at home, as I do."

Bicket agreed that no good came of men being out at night, when they should be asleep in their warm beds; and went away not much the wiser for his visit.

Gill was in want of flour, and he now asked

Tyrrel for some. While Tyrrel was weighing it out in the kitchen, Gill observed, with downcast eyes, that it was bad news that Bicket brought.

"It is five men wounded, not eight," said Tyrrel.

"Well: that's not quite so bad; but I'm very sorry for it."

"They should bide at home, as we do," observed Tyrrel, fixing his eyes on Gill's face.

"I'll say so," declared Gill, now understanding his part.

When he passed the window, he saw Black the tailor peeping about in the forecourt, and it struck upon his mind that he had not remembered to rake and smooth it over, early this morning. The frost had melted off a good deal; but still the ground showed marks of being much trodden. From Black he might have learned anything he wished about the keepers; for the tailor had been hired to watch with them last night; but Gill slipped out hastily at the back door, and hid himself in the washhouse till Black was gone.

Then it occurred to him that the tailor, or some other spy, would be molesting Jack in his absence; and he ran home with his flour, as quick as he could go. Jack was trenching in the cottage garden, but not whistling, as usual.

"Anybody been here, Jack? Anybody been speaking to ye?"

"No," said Jack, striking his spade into the ridge, with a sigh. "I've seen nobody this morning.—And," after a pause, "I don't want to see nobody."

"That's right. Bide at home, and work. You remember, Jack,—you remember,—if anybody should come and question ye,—you're not to peach, you know."

"Peach!" exclaimed Jack, in an astonished whisper. "Why, I've sworn not to,—han't I?"

"He'll do well, I trust," thought Gill, as he returned to his work. "It was only his innocence I feared,—for he is not so clever as some. But he is a boy of his word; and that'll make him a match for wiser men. He'll keep his tongue, I believe now."

Another gleam of comfort visited him on his way home. He met Rush, who told him that the game they had brought away was all got rid of.—It had been hoisted up on the early morning mail, by a safe hand, who had taken care that the guard should hear first what had happened in getting it. The guard was thus so far implicated that he would be no trouble, but rather an aid.

For once, the absolute order and regularity of

Miss Fermor's breakfast were broken up. After waiting a full quarter of an hour, she and Miss Wright sat down, without the lieutenant,—her nephew,—and without the attendance of any servant but the upper housemaid. Such a thing had never happened before as the men servants being all out of the way.—Miss Wright was silent and rather pale: Miss Fermor restless, but unable to decide whether she was most grieved or comfortable.

"It is such a fortunate thing," said she, "that none of my people were out with the colonel's this particular night! They were out with them five nights last month; and I dare say that is the reason why Lord A. was applied to this time. But I am very thankful. If Mitchelson had been killed, it would have made me very miserable. I am sorry enough for poor Woodruffe, as it is."

Then there was a pause. After which she said,
"My dear, you have nothing on your plate. There is pheasant on the sideboard: but there is nobody to give us anything.—I do wish somebody would come in. It is so forlorn, we two sitting here, deserted, as it were, and not knowing anything!"

"I was thinking of going down to the village," said Miss Wright: "but I do not like to leave

you alone. If you are as anxious to know the truth as I am, I will go directly."

"I am very anxious indeed: but it does look such a bleak morning for you, my dear. But for that, I would go with you myself; but it does look so cold!"

Miss Wright was just leaving the room, when the lieutenant came in by the back way from the stables, accompanied by the clergyman.

"I have brought in Mr. Dancaster, aunt," said the lieutenant. "And now, if you will give us some breakfast, I will tell you what we have done."

Miss Wright returned to her post; and Miss Fermor entreated her to take another cup, as she herself meant to do, now somebody was come. But Miss Wright declined; and Mr. Dancaster had not a thought to spare for eating and drinking; and it ended in the lieutenant's breakfasting alone.

"We have traced them with the utmost certainty, as far as your boundary," said the lieutenant to his aunt.

"And not further? Did they harbour here?"

"O! the traces went on, distinct enough; and we have sent one of Lord A.'s helpers and the tailor to follow them up. We hope their evidence will

do: but really it appeared unsafe to employ the constable,—the suspicion is so strong that he was one of them; and then, you know, he would have sworn the opposite of the fact, and made a difficulty. So he is set upon some harmless business that will occupy him and save appearances.”

“What a state of things it is!” exclaimed Mr. Dancaster.

“And why did not you send some of my people,—even Jones, as the most sensible?” asked Miss Fermor. “You know I should be most happy, Frank; for I feel it my duty to promote the cause of justice.”

“I know it, aunt: but, for Jones’s own sake, we would not let him go. We would not let any of your people go beyond your grounds,—for fear of their being observed. It might cost them their lives between this and the trial.”

Miss Fermor groaned.

“Don’t be afraid, aunt. Nobody saw us, I am confident. No one of us put our heads out of the grounds. But they say at the Hall that these desperate fellows are a regiment . . . ”

“Quite an army, Jones tells me.”

“The keepers say from fifteen to twenty, last night. A man who counted them in Tilleray’s farm-yard says either sixteen or seventeen; and . . . ”

"And how many on the keepers' side?" asked Miss Wright.

"Keepers and their hired help together, nine of the colonel's, and ten of Lord A.'s. But those poachers last night were not the whole gang. Some fellows who are notorious poachers were certainly not with them. There is no saying who is who; and all we know is that they are very strong, and wholly desperate. And I thought it no business of mine, aunt, to expose your people to a sly shot, as intended witnesses."

"What a state of things!" sighed Mr. Dancaster, while Miss Fermor was so alarmed that her nephew was obliged to reiterate that the danger was only till, by help from Bow-street, the guilty should be captured, and lodged in gaol;—only, perhaps, till after the inquest;—only, perhaps, for this one day.

"But must any of my people be witnesses on the trial?" asked Miss Fermor.

"Why, yes: and you know, aunt, you are always anxious, as you said just now, to promote the cause of justice.—We have traced the footsteps all the way through your estate; and we have found some feathers,—hen pheasant's feathers,—under the large elm in Taylor's garden. Taylor himself saw two shots fired in his garden, and two

birds fall. And we must testify to finding the feathers on the ice under the tree."

"What do you think of all this, Mr. Dancaster? Is it not dreadful?" asked Miss Fermor.

"Think!" exclaimed Mr. Dancaster. "It almost deprives one of all power of thinking.—When I came, I was told much of this as a game-preserving neighbourhood, involving the difficulties which always prevail where poaching is rife. But I never conceived of anything like the reality,—nor of the perplexity of knowing what to do."

"Ah!" said Miss Fermor; "that is always what I feel."

"One says, confidently enough at first," observed the clergyman, "that one's duty is clear; to uphold the laws, and defend the rights of property. But when it comes to matters of practice,—when I see a poor young man like Tippet shot dead by a spring-gun,—and now, the father of a family murdered, and many more wounded,—for the sake of such property as that in wild animals, one begins to think"

He paused.

"To think what?" inquired the lieutenant.

"I will not say what," replied the clergyman. "This is not a day for thinking coolly of such things. I can only say that I have little comfort

in my office now. There is positive agony in conducting the funerals of persons so put out of life. And in preaching, with what comfort can I address myself to a flock of hearers so mixed,—so corrupted,—carrying such thoughts and passions in their breasts! Only imagine one of the apostles preaching to an assembly bearing such enmity to each other . . . ”

“ O shocking !” cried Miss Fermor.

“ It is shocking,” replied Mr. Dancaster: “ a mockery,—a horrible mockery,—of what a Christian congregation ought to be.”

“ We must each do our duty,” declared the lieutenant: “ that is the only course that I see.”

“ Certainly,” said Miss Fermor. “ We must all do our duty. I am sure I am very anxious to do mine, if I knew how.”

“ There is one thing, aunt, that I almost answered for your being willing to grant:—that the magistrates should hold their sittings here, as soon as the inquest is over, and the parties apprehended. You see, neither Lord A. nor the colonel can have the sittings held there,—the colonel being the prosecutor, and Lord A’s men having been engaged. Happily, you are out of the affair altogether; and your house is the proper

one for the magistrates. I am sure you will think so."

Miss Fermor looked at Mr. Dancaster. He said that justice must now take its course: there could be no doubt about that; and every one should be willing to further that course.

Miss Fermor therefore charged her nephew with an offer of her house to the three magistrates under whose examination this case must come, desiring him to say particularly how anxious she always was to do her duty in promoting the cause of justice.

CHAPTER VIII.

HATRED WITHOUT DISSIMULATION.

ON the Saturday, everybody met everybody else in the village street. The inquest was held at the Rampant Horse; the Bow-street officer was expected by the mail; and no one, whether immediately concerned or not, could stay at home. Among those who thus met were lawyer Bunney and the doctor.

“What is the matter, doctor? To look at you, one would think you had had an absent fit, and taken a dose of your drugs yourself instead of giving it to a patient, like”

“Now, Bunney, have done! I have no mind and no time for joking this morning. I am summoned”

“Well! so am I. But you don’t see me look white upon it, like you.”

“You are summoned?”

“Yes; here is a note from the colonel, requesting me to attend the magistrates at Miss Fermor’s, after the inquest.”

"My turn comes first, then," said the doctor. "I have to open the body, and report the cause of death."

And he again turned so pale, that Bunney dreaded the report his face would give.

"There were no bullets used, you know."

"None, that I saw: that is true," replied the doctor, brightening up a little.

"That is your strong point, you see."

"I see."

"And that ought to set our minds entirely at ease, doctor. It does mine, I assure you."

They nodded and parted.

The doctor reported to the Coroner's jury that the deceased certainly died of gun-shot wounds: and, on being cross-examined, said that the shot which had caused his death was common game-shot, such as people shoot hares with.

As he returned home, and again exchanged nods with Bunney, who was on his way to attend the magistrates, the doctor said to himself that Bunney was a lucky fellow to have such a devil-may-care spirit. There he was now, going as jauntily up the street as if there was a merry-making at the end of his walk. But the doctor thought afterwards that such a devil-may-care spirit may carry a man too far.

Bunney kept to his agreement with Tyrrel in what he said before the magistrates as to the hours of their visiting each other on the Thursday, their time of parting, and so on : but he ventured on some particulars, in his random way, which were quite inconsistent with parts of Tyrrel's statement, and which caused the magistrates at once to issue a warrant for the apprehension of Tyrrel. Moreover, when Bunney's examination was over, he volunteered the observation to two gentlemen (one of whom was a magistrate) that Colonel North and Lord A. had brought it all upon themselves, by setting man-traps and spring-guns : and that he was confident that none of the men would have thought of firing on the keepers, if Tippet had not been killed.—This observation being immediately reported to the two sitting magistrates, they told Bunney that it proved him to know more of the murder than he had chosen to disclose. This he denied, and made a sort of apology for having spoken his mind ; which, however, he declared to be everybody's mind.—He was then asked if he thought the poachers were justified by Tippet's death in doing what they had done : to which he replied he thought them not justified. There was some idea of detaining him ; and the colonel was unwilling that he should be

at large : but as there was no sufficient ground for his arrest, he was allowed to go home for this time.

Before he reached the village, however, he was passed by the colonel and nearly twenty other horsemen, no one of whom returned his bow.

“ There they goes to their hunting,” he heard a ditcher say, on the other side the hedge. “ There they goes to their sport, for all the shooting and hanging that’s done to we.”

“ You’re wrong, friend,” said Bunney, stopping, and following the party with his eye. “ They have neither dog nor gun abroad to-day ; though I should not wonder if there be a pistol or two among them.”

“ I thought they’d been out a hunting,” said the ditcher.

“ Well ; in one sense they may be ;—gone to hunt down a man or two, for this murder.”

The ditcher leaped into the road, and gazed after the party, now just passing out of sight.

“ Will they get him, think you, Dick ? ”

“ What,—Tyrrel, or the blacksmith, or who ? ”

“ Any of them. Say Tyrrel.”

“ Why, they say Tyrrel says that no man can say he laid a hand on him, or ever shall say. So they say he says.”

"I heard something like that: that he says he would sooner die than go to jail. What do you think of that, Dick?"

The man laughed, and said Tyrrel was a very particular fellow. There was not so much in just going to prison. A score of as good men as Tyrrel, only not tax-collectors exactly, had gone to prison about the hares and the pheasants; and he did not know that anybody but a gentleman or two thought the worse of them for it. When Bunney moved on, Dick called after him to know if he was going round by Tyrrel's, to see what was doing: to which Bunney replied "No," and walked on, saying to himself that he was not quite up to that.

Gill was in one of Tyrrel's out-houses when he heard the tramp of Colonel North's party coming up the road. He, too, thought they were going hunting, and his observation to himself was that he was glad they were amusing themselves, and turning their minds away from the murder and its perpetrators.—But he drew back out of sight, with all speed, when he saw that several of the party dismounted, and fastened their horses to the palings, while of those who remained mounted, some stood guard at the gate, while others rode round to the rear of the premises. In two

minutes, the house was completely surrounded. Gill placed himself where he could peep through a crevice in the shed : and the next thing he saw was a pistol in the colonel's hand, while he heard him say he would have Tyrrel, dead or alive.

"He has fastened himself in," thought Gill. "He will never let himself be taken, if I know the man."

Gill's spirit rose, every moment, while he witnessed the unavailing knocking and summoning ; —his party-spirit rose, and his attachment to, or admiration of Tyrrel, as his master,—as the man he had been accustomed to look up to, and be guided by. His heart beat, and he rubbed his hands, as he stood at the crevice. But, before long, an upper window opened, and Tyrrel showed himself, asking what he was wanted for ; to which several replied, in a shout, "for murder." Tyrrel drew back without answering, and shut the window.

The party then began an attack upon the doors, with tools which they had brought with them. Gill's heart was at his throat with every blow. He forgot himself, and even Jack. After a loud crack of the door, the lattice again opened, and Tyrrel appeared, offering to surrender, if the colonel would promise that no one should lay

hands upon him. Some parley ensued, during which the door gave way, and resistance was hopeless. As the colonel entered the house, Tyrrel stood at the head of the stairs, with his hands in his pockets, still striving to make his terms,—that no one should touch him.

Gill could understand what was passing within by what he had heard his master say from the window. He now saw the colonel bring out his prisoner, holding him by the collar, and deliver him in charge to two of his own servants. One of the men raised a stick in a threatening manner; and this was more than Gill could bear. He rushed from the shed, crying out,

“I’ll be damned if you strike him. Strike him if you dare! I’m a witness against you if you strike him.”

The colonel turned at the shout, and seeing a man rushing up, supposed a rescue was in preparation, and intercepted Gill with a blow of the fist which laid him flat before he knew where he was.

“Seize him,” the colonel directed, “and carry him too before the magistrates, for attempting a rescue.”

Nobody at any of the great houses dreamed before of Gill’s being in any way concerned in

the business. He was known merely as a common labourer, and had not attracted attention from having been seen in any mischief. Now, however, suspicion was turned upon him ; and within the hour a force arrived to examine his cottage. There it was discovered that his step-son had, twenty minutes before, been mounted on a horse of his neighbour Lacy's, by Lacy himself, and had ridden off rapidly down the turnpike road.

As Gill was detained chiefly on suspicion, and as he seemed a simple sort of man who was hardly likely to keep his own counsel, after so foolishly implicating himself, he was merely cooped at the Hall,—made comfortable with the servants, and favoured with some encouraging interviews with the gentlemen. He had never been accustomed to conceal his feelings : and perhaps he had never before had any very strong feelings to conceal : and the revelations of his countenance and manner now almost amused those who were watching him. They saw his relief when told that Jack had gone away on horseback ; and his dismay when he heard that Jack had been brought back, and up to the hall : his relief again at Jack's stout denial of knowing anything of the whole business : and his dismay again at finding that, in spite of this denial, Jack was not released.

Then arrived one harassing piece of news upon another. The mail-guard was taken up, the next morning. Gill thought, on hearing this, what probably all his comrades thought,

"Ah! now it is all over with us. His maxim always is to mind his own business, and let others mind theirs. He'll peach, and save himself. That is what he will call minding his own business: and the hanging he will call ours."

Then came the news of the capture of this, and that, and the other of the gang; and then of the disappearance of four of them. Tim and Solomon Wells were never heard of again: and Barton and another stole away. The eleven others were all caught, which, with Gill himself, made up the sixteen who had taken the oath.

And then, about this oath. The colonel's servants talked in Gill's hearing of their expectation that two of the prisoners would have confessed, before two days were over. Their master, they said, had offered two hundred guineas to either of these men who would confess, and safety to his neck, and removal to America, or some nice place, after the trial, if he would turn King's evidence. Gill's heart swelled in his breast when he thought how it was not in flesh and blood to resist this; and how his own life and Jack's now hung on the

regard these two men might have to an oath. Of course, his emotion was remarked ; and a similar offer was made to him. He uttered no reply, but walked restlessly about the house for hours.

Next day, one of the keepers mentioned in his presence that Black the tailor had traced sixteen people almost every step of the way the poachers had been on Thursday night, and that he had curious things to tell of Tyrrel's inquiries about the game on Miss Fermor's estate.—And then, Gill was requested to walk into the gun-room, to speak with a magistrate who had spent the night at the Hall.

He went, prepared for the worst : but the magistrate had nothing very fearful to say to him ; and again his heart expanded under the sense of relief. He was told that if he had any brother or son whom he wished to serve, he could save the life of such an one, as well as his own, and provide comfortably for both, by at length doing his duty to the law, and promoting its course.

“That makes all the difference,” cried Gill. “It is hard to hang one's own flesh and blood,—which I consider Jack, though he is only my step-son.”

He still asked for time, however ; and it was

not till the next day, Thursday the 25th, that he made his confession.

He was then allowed to see Jack. It was desirable, as Jack's life was promised, to obtain from him also a confession, to accredit and corroborate his step-father's.

"Ye look but badly, Jack," said his father.
"What have they been doing to ye?"

"There 's a man they call a Bow-street man, keeps coming and telling me to confess, or I'll be hanged."

"Well, Jack, that 's what ye 'd better do, and then they can't hang ye."

"I dunnot know whether they will or no ; and I 'm weary o' lookin' for it. Every time the man goes away, I think they 'll come and hang me, every minute."

Gill explained to him, to his extreme relief, that he could not be hanged in private at the Hall. Then he urged him to tell all he knew.

"I can't, because I took the oath not to peach. If I could, I wunnot have let the man talk of hanging me every day. I would have done it at first."

"But do it now, Jack, and then we will go away after the trial where we will be happy. I

would not ask you to do what I would not do myself. I have told all I know."

"Ye have!" said Jack, with a stare. "Well now, I thought all this time ye had taken the oath not to peach. I thought you all had, afore Ben and I came in. I'm glad there's a way for ye, father, for one."

Jack was plied in this manner, still in vain, for three more days, when he was at length committed to the county jail, in the hope that the terror of a prison might work upon him to confess. In this hope, he was kept by himself, and communicated with only by those who called themselves friends,—that is, the jailer and magistrates or their agents. But these friends of Jack's knew nothing of his hourly expectation of hanging, the week before; or they would not have anticipated so much from mere imprisonment. They could only hope that when the assizes came, he would better understand his situation, and appreciate the advantages offered him by the colonel.

"How do you get on with him?" asked the colonel of the Bow-street officer, one day, when two parties met on the road to the county town.

"We can make nothing of him, Sir. We have let him know now that it was not a real oath that he took: but 'tis all the same. I

never met with a stronger case of honour among thieves."

"And," said a chuckling keeper, "in such a goose as poor Jack Foote!"

"Hold your tongue!" said the colonel. "Honour is honour wherever you find it, and a thing not to be laughed at."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HOUSE ON THE SAND.

THE colonel had intended to go to London, as soon as the dismal business of the assizes was over, the next April: but he was called home so peremptorily that he arrived at the Hall on the night of the day which closed the trials. In the interest of the events of January, he had since forgotten the hand-bill of October: but some other people were not so careless. The maid-servants had kept up the dread of fire through the winter; and the men-servants had comforted them by pointing out that the threat of incendiarism was to be fulfilled only on the conviction and sentence of poachers, so that the houses of the gentry were safe till the assizes. Now, the poachers had been convicted and sentenced; and on the very morning after, a charred stick had been found near the door of the wash-house. The alarm spread to Miss Fermor's household; and an express was sent off to the colonel. He waited

only to hear sentence pronounced on Bunney, whose trial immediately succeeded that of the poachers, and then returned to the Hall, accompanied by a friend or two to help him, if need were.

He really could not at all tell whether there was danger. All he knew was that he had scarcely a neighbour below his own rank who could be reckoned on as well disposed towards him ; while those who were unfriendly had certainly conceived the idea of burning his house. Whether the danger was real or imaginary, it was clearly his duty to be on the spot, to support his household and friends, and overawe his enemies. Lord A. had so strongly felt the same duty incumbent on him, that he too had gone home, as had other neighbouring proprietors. The colonel's companions this night were therefore only Mr. Dancaster and Mr. Sprechen,—the lieutenant coming and going between his aunt's house and the colonel's.

It was a fine April night,—with a bright moon, —favourable to the purpose of the gentlemen, which was to walk to and fro, before and near the house, to keep off intruders, and beguile unfriendly eyes, while the servants were busy in carrying out from the back doors the most valuable

pictures, books and plate, and depositing them in the dairy-house till the alarm should be over. Perhaps three heavier hearts could scarcely have been found under the veil of composed and gentlemanly manners than those of the colonel and his companions, as they were apparently amusing and refreshing themselves with a moonlight stroll: and indeed the clergyman hardly pretended to any calmness; but they talked; and, on the whole, in the tone of ordinary conversation.

"I dare say we are taking this trouble very unnecessarily," declared the colonel, on dismissing a servant with orders; "but I would not lose some old pictures that I have for want of a little care."

"Once secure what insurance will not console you for losing, and you may be, so far, tolerably easy," observed the clergyman.

"Insurance does but little to comfort one at any time," replied the colonel, "and it is good for less than ever just now."

Mr. Sprechen explained to the clergyman that the insurance offices refused at present to extend insurances on any terms that were worth accepting,—in this district, and others where the country people were up against the Act of last session.

"Upon my word, I don't wonder," sighed Mr.

Dancaster, "at any excess the people are driven to, when half a village is transported,—as ours is to be :—half the men, I mean; while the wretched women and children come upon the workhouse. I don't know how it is ; but the penalty of transportation never appeared to me before at all as it does to-day. My mind ought, I know, to be most filled with the execution of to-morrow ; and to-morrow it will appear horrible enough,—when I have to visit poor old Tyrrel ; and the widow too ; and Croft's widow. But to-day one is haunted by the idea of such a fate as poor Bunney's."

"I am far from agreeing with you," said the colonel. "I with pleasure asked for mercy for the majority of the gang ; but I could not in conscience ask it for Bunney. The last of the group who would have my compassion would be the man of education, the professional man, who would strengthen his less taught neighbours in their purposes of crime by his presence, and"

He stopped, suddenly remembering the presence of Mr. Sprechen, whose own son had done exactly what he was describing. It was Mr. Sprechen, however, who now took up the word.

"It was very bad," he said ; "and in my eyes not the better, but the worse, for his taking care, as he says, that it was not a Testament that he

swore them upon. There was a criminal levity in it; and, I conclude, a selfish and ignorant care for his own safety, while he was sporting with their consciences."

"Consciences,—pooh!" said the colonel, as to himself.

"But," continued Mr. Sprechen, "I put it to your fair and candid mind, Colonel North, whether Bunney would have aided and countenanced, and sworn these men if they had been going out on an expedition which would be universally called criminal;—a going forth to commit highway robbery, or to fire a stack-yard, or to steal sheep or poultry."

"He must have known," said the colonel mildly, "that what all considered crime might or must come temptingly under their hand. They carried sticks, you know. Suppose the guns to have been merely to shoot the game with, there were the sticks: and people do not take pheasants with sticks, though they often knock down keepers."

"And especially when they know of a large body of keepers armed with sticks, lying in wait for them. It should be remembered that when the numbers in conflict increase as they do in this place,—now, in the present case, amounting to sixteen against nineteen, the affair takes more

and more the aspect of a skirmish,—a row,—and less and less that of a thieving expedition.—So that, while I condemn Bunney's conduct as utterly as you do, I imagine I see more clearly than you the necessity of obviating temptation to such young men ; and I am certainly very far from being able to say ‘ Pooh ! pooh !’ about the consciences of my erring and stricken neighbours. If ever in my life I witnessed an instance of the supremacy of conscience over the very love of life, it was in one of those poor criminals yesterday.”

“ How ! what ! What was that ? ” inquired Mr. Dancaster.

“ Well, well,” said the colonel ; “ that little exclamation was to myself : and it was an accident that you heard it.”

“ But what was that case you were speaking of ? ” asked Mr. Dancaster.

“ The most interesting point in the whole affair,” said the colonel. “ Poor Jack Foote . . .”

“ O ! I remember about his refusal to peach.”

“ He persisted to the last, even when made aware that he could do nothing to save his comrades ; and also that his oath was not taken on the Testament. He would have gone before the Grand Jury with his father, just because his father did, but for the oath which was in the way. He

positively and perseveringly refused to swear,—to do anything but take his chance with the rest ; and he now lies under sentence of death.”

A pause ensued ; and then the colonel said

“ Yes, I was wrong in speaking lightly of their consciences, with this case, and even his father’s, before me. The poor man is wretched. His main object was to save Jack ; and now he feels he has ruined him with the rest. He knows that none will be hanged but Tyrrel and Henry Croft ; but unless he can get out to the penal colony with Jack, I don’t know how he is to bear his life. His remorse is dreadful. And as for telling him he has discharged his duty, and done his best to repair his wrong, you might as well bid a bursting cloud cease to shed water, as hope to comfort him in any such way.”

“ There seems some conscience existing here too,” observed Mr. Dancaster.

“ True,” said the colonel. “ I was wrong. Let it pass.”

“ In a moment,” said Mr. Sprechen. “ Only this first. If we are to form an opinion on one another in that matter at all, one party may as well as another. See how, on this supposition, Tom Tippet’s death and your conscience, colonel, stand in relation to each other. These men may

and do say that it is true you did not take up a gun, and shoot Tom Tippet for getting into your field, contrary to notice: but you anticipated and made ready for such an event. When your spring-gun was charged, it was for the purpose of shooting somebody, if touched: and that somebody was not supposed to be worse than a trespasser; though he might chance to be guiltless of even that much offence."

"I don't undertake to argue the right and wrong of that matter, Sprechen,—there being the law to decide it. I take my stand upon the law."

"You do?"

"To be sure I do. How can you doubt it?"

"Because it is clear to me that you are mistaken:—that the law does not warrant that act of yours."

"God bless me!" cried the colonel; "what a doctrine to bring up now!"

"I know you have followed the practice of men of your standing and neighbourhood, and that you believed yourself fully justified: but those who think otherwise are not only poor Tippet's associates, but some legal authorities which would have weight with you."

"But the colonel must have consulted legal

authorities before he charged his guns," suggested Mr. Dancaster.

Mr. Sprechen left it to the colonel to answer; and it was some time before there was any reply.

"Why no," said he. "I cannot say I ever before dreamed of a doubt upon the subject. And a most harassing one I find it now. It never can be—it is inconceivable—that I should have begun . . . Well! I will have every gun discharged till I have obtained the best legal opinions that can be had. And there let it rest for to-night."

"And for ever," said Mr. Sprechen, "unless you yourself renew the subject. I only wished . . ."

"I see, I see. Your rebuke was fair enough if your law is right. And if there really is an opinion on the other side, I don't know that I would very rigidly maintain my stand on the law, as far as my own property is concerned."

Mr. Sprechen thought that the sin and doom of the sixteen avengers of Tom Tippet was a pretty strong testimony to the state of opinion in the village. And so deep and loud were now the complaints, from town and country, against such a method of guarding land from trespass, that he had little doubt that the legislature would soon prohibit its use.

After another turn and pause, the colonel ob-

served that he had nothing to say in favour of stretching the law, one way or another ; but he owned he did not see what men would have who complained of the present state of things, determined as that was by the law. He did not see what any one could do but go straight forward in the way of right and duty.

“ I will do my utmost,” Mr. Dancaster declared. “ Nothing that I can think of doing or urging shall be wanting in this state of things,—so fearful and disgraceful in an English parish. I will preach,—and I am sure it will be from my heart,—I will exhort to ‘ Follow after the things that make for peace.’ ”

A quick eye might have seen in the moonlight Mr. Sprechen’s glance of apprehension at the colonel, lest he should take this as personal satire. But no such idea occurred to the colonel.

“ I am sure,” said he, “ you will not have a more cordial hearer than myself. If my neighbours would but mind their own business, and leave me and my friends to follow our lawful sports in peace and quietness, they would find me good-natured enough. I love to see them happy and good ; and I do my utmost to throw my weight into the scale of law and order. At least, I have always endeavoured to do so.”

"How is it then that we are in such a state?" asked Mr. Sprechen.

"And how on earth are we to get out of it?" exclaimed the clergyman.

"As for how we got into it," said the colonel, "God knows,—for He alone knows the wickedness of the human heart,—the wild propensities of fallen man for mischief. Our business, I conceive, is to govern them by the wholesome restraint of law."

"Taking care, I should add," said Mr. Sprechen, "not to flatter or exasperate any such propensities by bad laws and unjust arrangements. For one instance,—many thousands of men and women have a strong and natural wish to eat game, and do not, for the most part, see any reason why they should not. Many hundreds,—not to say thousands,—have a yet stronger desire to pursue and take the hare which is seen running wild in the lane or fields, and the shy bird which flies, as free as the robin, out of any hedge, and roosts in any tree. But the law comes in, and makes it an offence for the eaters to buy game; for ninety-nine in a hundred lovers of sport to shoot it, and for those who nominally maintain it to sell it."

"You would legalize the sale of game," said the colonel. "To say nothing of other objections,

that plan would not answer your purpose. There would be more poaching than ever, I am persuaded."

"We ought to try; that is my persuasion," said Mr. Sprechen. "It is prohibited articles that are smuggled and poached; and to open their sale has been hitherto found the true means of reducing the transgression to the lowest point attainable."

"It is already done, practically," said the colonel. "Here, in this neighbourhood, I could tell you of not a few shabby fellows who sell their game; and nowhere is poaching more rife.—I grant you, however, that this is not the same thing, in point of moral effect, with a legalized sale of game. But the moral effect of a legalized sale would disappoint you. All true sportsmen and gentlemen would refuse to sell; and the market would be supplied by poachers."

"I think it might answer, the qualification being, of course, much extended," said Mr. Sprechen. "But I, in my turn, grant you that we may be quite out in any arrangements we may plan: for there is a fatal peculiarity in the preservation of game,—I hardly know what,"

"Surely one may see what," said the colonel. "The peculiarity of game property is the impossi-

bility of identifying it. It is this which will nullify all the arrangements you talk of: and it is this which renders it necessary, in my opinion, to make it sacred,—not to be touched on any pretence, but by a well defined and small order of persons, under stringent conditions.”

“And when that arrangement shall have dissolved, under the pressure of circumstances, never to be restored, what next?”

“We must assume it as still existing, and act accordingly,” decided the colonel.

“There is where we differ,” said both his companions. “It is too much,” said Mr. Sprechen, “to sacrifice four lives, and transport and banish fourteen more men from one district, for the maintenance of such an assumption, in regard to a single game-estate.”

“It is too much,” fervently declared the clergyman.

“But, my good friends, what are we to do? Here is the game! Here is the law! What would you have?”

“I conceive we must have a continual amelioration,” said Mr. Sprechen, “such as has taken place, from time to time, since game became property. One oppression after another has ceased; one restriction after another has given way. And

I am persuaded that such is to be still the order of things ; and that calamities, like that which has visited our village now, are the signs of approaching change. We shall soon have done with the barbarism of traps and all mechanical ambush for men : and soon after, I think we shall see the sale of game legalized, and the qualification to shoot much extended. If these measures do not answer ”

“ Ah ! then, how are we to get back again ? ”

“ The best feature of the change will be that we cannot get back again. To have left our present state behind will be a blessing of itself.—If the next steps do not answer, men must go forward again, according to the best wisdom of the then present time.”

“ I hope you will please to ask us first,” said the colonel, smiling ; “ to consult us before so disposing of our rights and our property.”

“ It will be done by yourselves, colonel. It will be done by parliament, of course. You have legislated freely for your own sports and property ; and you will legislate for the control of your sports and the adjustment of your game property to the interests of society, when society sees this to be required by its interests. That day will come, colonel, as sure as fate.”

“Thank you for the prediction.”

“ You may be grateful, I think. In those times, you will not have to act the patrol round your own dwelling, nor keep your best pictures in the dairy-house.”

The colonel was surprised, and almost vexed with himself that he could make no better fight for his prized game rights : but he had no inclination to bring forward now his sayings in praise of country sports, in which he knew his companions agreed, nor his convictions, in which he knew they disagreed, that landlords’ residence, with all the benefits of residence on estates, depended on the preservation of game, according to the law of that time.

It seemed also as if he and Sprechen had changed characters to-night, — Sprechen being fired by the insight he had gained through his young son’s peril and temptation, in addition to his long professional knowledge of the working of the Game-laws ; and the colonel being first depressed by the spectacle of the trials, and then stung to the quick by the doubt, now first raised, whether he had not been an aggressor,—perhaps the first and worst aggressor,—by setting spring-guns murderously charged. If it were indeed so, where was now his pride of right and legality? his

dignified stand upon the law? What must he think of his confidence in pursuing his neighbours to banishment and the gallows? Was there indeed truth in the words of the reckless young man whom he had this day seen standing, white as a corpse, to receive his sentence of seven years' transportation,—ruin and infamy for life,—for administering the poachers' oath?—was there truth in those words, despised at the time, but now disturbing to the soul,—sickening to the very heart,—“Lord A. and Colonel North had brought it all upon themselves by setting the guns; and he did not believe any of the men would ever have thought of firing upon the keepers, if one of their own party had not first been killed.”

It was a relief from the pang of his new-born fear to turn to what Mr. Dancaster was saying.

“ You are right undoubtedly,” he was saying to Mr. Sprechen. “ As a lawyer, and also as a moralist, you are undoubtedly right in aiming at such alterations in the law as may lessen instead of exasperating temptation. I will go with you heart and hand in that. But, at the same time, I remember how all laws have hitherto failed with regard to this particular species of property; and I cannot be sanguine about any new ones. Whether more or less severe in themselves, whether

more or less harshly administered, they appear to have absolutely no effect whatever in protecting game, while they in consequence are very powerful in creating contempt and hatred for law, and the very name of justice. Mend the law, by all means, if it is mischievous: but when you have done this, it is a mere negative good. It may obviate some future corruption; but it cannot institute a reform."

"I agree with you entirely," said Mr. Sprechen. "It is the good old truth that you are uttering,—that men cannot be made moral by Act of Parliament."

"It is a slow and most imperfect expedient, however right in itself," resumed Mr. Dancaster. "The true corrective may be slow too,—may take a generation or two for its entire accomplishment: but it may begin at any hour, and work much in a year. My only trust is in education,—a truly Christian education which shall"

"I agree with you there entirely," said the colonel, eagerly. "Our poor must be taught to resist temptation, to keep their hands from picking and stealing, to be obedient to all who are in authority. When they have learned that, there will be no more poaching."

"That is true; but it is not all my meaning,"

declared Mr. Dancaster. “The educational process you speak of will be an extremely slow one; hopelessly slow, if pursued by itself. There is another party to the affair, who, as being more capable, and better prepared, ought to learn their lesson first. It is my clear opinion, Colonel North, that the Christian education I speak of should begin with the country gentlemen. They can read their bibles. I wish they would so far study them as to learn practically to deny themselves in some of their liberties, lest they should become ‘a stumbling-block to those who are weak.’ I wish they would discipline themselves, for one year of their lives, to abstain from a gratification, however innocent in their own eyes, which causes any poor weak brother to offend. The apostle says ‘while the world standeth;’ but for unpractised Christians, let us say only till our weak brethren are educated up to something like equality of enlightenment with us.”

“I fancy you have somewhat changed your views, Mr. Dancaster, since you first came here.”

“Yes, indeed, through wider changes that have been going on around me. My attention had never been duly fixed on the morality of rural parishes till this last tremendous winter opened to me such a scene, that I tremble to look into it. It is a spot of rank heathendom which I am called to

christianize. This is enough to sober the most sanguine—to deepen the most superficial man. At first, I was like a child in these matters,—these unhallowed contentions of yours. I was violently moved by all I saw, and apt to agree with the last pleader, on any side. But, now I have seen and heard all, I perceive the whole system to be radically wrong which sets up such a competition of violence, selfishness and fraud. You, colonel, are, or ought to be,—it is your claim to be—the Christian gentleman of this parish: and I have found that your hand is against every man, and every man's against you. Is this the position—(putting aside the question of whose fault it is)—is this the position for the head of a Christian society?—And then, what a marring of all sacred rites have I to blush for in my parish! My very voice trembles when I pray in church against our being led into temptation, and for forgiveness of our trespasses as we forgive others. And at the communion table, my heart sinks with fear and shame when I know what hypocrisy is there,—that those who eat of the same bread, and drink of the same cup, have nothing short of murder in their hearts.”

“ You were saying how wholly inoperative our human laws have proved against this class of

offences," observed Mr. Sprechen. " It seems as if the divine laws wrought no better."

"They have never been tried," said Mr. Dan-caster. " Only try them,—beginning with the party who knows them best, or pretends to do so; and you will see whether in this, as in all other stress, they are not mighty to save.—But I have not done easing my soul about our mockeries. We are wont to say that the churchyard is a place of peace;—that there, where rich and poor lie down together, where lord and slave are equal, and where the childish cry of contention is hushed in the expectation of the last trump,—in such a place of solemn peace, what have our interments been? Look at the two which, with shame and dismay, I have had to conduct there,—uttering words of calm faith, hope and charity over mur-dered men whose mourners were filled with tumult, despair and vindictiveness. And those two graves suggest the thought of several which ought to be there hereafter, but never will. Two young men, whose last home they never doubted would be there, will to-morrow die, but have no graves. Others who came up weekly at the sound of our Sabbath bell will soon be gone where they will too probably never hear church bell more, but will be laid in wild ground, with the depth of the

globe between their bones and those of their fathers;—their now mourning parents, for whose griefs and shame the kindly grave is already opening.”

“They say,” observed Mr. Sprechen, “that old Tyrrel wholly disbelieves his son’s guilt, and has spent the savings of his industrious life in his defence.”

“I will look to that,” said the colonel. “The old man shall not suffer.”

“Shall not suffer!” exclaimed Mr. Dancaster. “Better promise that he shall ‘not die! He is death-stricken; so that affairs of the purse matter little to him now. Your best kindness is to leave him undisturbed;—not to agitate him by visit or message; and least of all by gifts.”

“As you think best. I respect that old man. I need not tell you, Mr. Dancaster, my desire to give what aid and comfort I can. I do, and ever shall, consider myself the injured party; but this makes me only the more anxious to show mercy in enforcing justice.”

“These cases are beyond your scope of mercy, I fear, or I would come to you freely,” said Mr. Dancaster. “Old Wells is deprived of his stout sons, and must endure a hard and weary old age. Tippet’s mother has, a second time, and more

horribly, lost a son. Hayward's sisters must struggle on as they can: and one of them has a deep heart-wound: she was to have been Noyse's wife ere this. Poor Jack will, I fear, lose that innocence which is nearly all that God gave him ”

“I cannot bear this,” said the colonel. “It can do no good to harrow one's soul in this way.”

“If *we* cannot bear these things,” said Mr. Dancaster, “what a spectacle must there be under those shining roofs where the quiet moon might seem to be shedding repose! Perhaps in time all may agree that there is no good, but fearful evil, in harrowing human souls for rights in beasts and birds.”

“That was a right pretty early and solemnly conferred, if I read my Bible truly,” observed the colonel.

“You mean when God gave man dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowl of the air, and every living thing that lived on the earth. To me now it seems that we have, by our selfish devices, reversed this promise. In this spot of the earth, at least, it is certain that we have given to the hare in the furrow, and the pheasant at roost, dominion over the fortunes, lives and souls of men.”

FOUR YEARS
AT
MAUDE-CHAPEL FARM.

FOUR YEARS AT MAUDE-CHAPEL FARM.

CHAPTER I.

HENRY'S PROSPECTS.

WIDOW FARN was a happy woman ;—still happy, though she had fully believed, for some few weeks together, that she should never be happy again. Her husband had died, after three days' illness, and left her confounded and amazed with the sense of woe, experienced for the first time in her life ; and then it was that she believed and said that she should never more be happy. Thus far, all had gone prosperously with her :—her husband and she had never been ill ; their little farm, on which they had dwelt since their marriage, had answered well ; their three children all lived, and were promising in their several ways ; and Mrs. Farn had an easy and hopeful temper, which did not give way under the little

daily crosses of life. So that, though her help and her tears were ready for any suffering neighbour, and she supposed she knew all about sorrow, and spoke feelingly of the chequered character of human life, she was in fact as ignorant of the most painful emotions of the human heart as her little son Ned ; without, however, wearing out other people with high spirits as Ned did, but rather enjoying popularity by means of her incessant hopefulness and good construction of events.—It was a terrible sight to those who knew her well to see the sunk and amazed grief of her countenance, when it first appeared in her widow's cap ; and it moved them to tears to hear the timid and uncertain tones of her voice, when she again assumed the direction of affairs at home. Some said she would never be the same woman again, and that they should preserve, as if she were dead, the remembrance of her former self, as of the most cheerful person they had ever known. Others believed that she would rally, and soon. And these last were right. Habit has much to do with these matters : and, as persons who have been overmuch or overlong tried by misfortune remain apprehensive, and unable to enjoy the securest happiness, so the life-long habit of relish of existence in Mrs. Farn gained upon her sorrow,

and rendered her unable to maintain it. She soon began, not only to admit and see, (as she had ever done) but to feel with joy what a blessing of a son Henry was to her : and that Dinah was as sweet a young girl as could be seen ; and, as for Ned, he was her delight above everything in the world. Next, when the spring drew on, and the green blade was coming up in the field, and the young lambs were about the yard and in the meadow, and she heard the cuckoo for the first time that season, and the sunshine spread into the afternoons, so that she descried, after her early tea, a glittering sail on the line of sea which bounded her horizon, her heart sprang up as in former years,—her black eyes sparkled again, and her voice was strong in cheerfulness once more. —She said to herself what a sin it would be to be gloomy and ungrateful when God had left her so much ;—such children, and a home that she was fond of, and a nice little farm for herself and Henry to manage ; and means of living from this farm enough for the family wants, with a little over in most years,—to be spent in improving the land so as to bring in yet a little more, and thus keep their prospects perpetually enlarging. These considerations would not have made her a happy woman, if she had not been so from other causes ;

but they accounted to herself for her being so, and reconciled her to it.

Maude-chapel farm, her home, which she thought the perfection of beauty, would not have struck a stranger as being altogether so replete with charms. Yet it had its comely features, as every farm must have. It was situated in a country about as far from picturesque as any in England,—near the coast, in the flat county of Norfolk, where a rising ground which would hardly be perceived elsewhere becomes almost as important as a hill of sixty feet is found in an American prairie, from the extent of survey which it affords. There were a few undulations in and about Maude-chapel farm which were as good as mountains to the dwellers there. They admitted of shadows and partial lights. One eminence afforded a sea-view, with its distant light-house,—a greater treasure and glory on a winter evening or summer night than any one of the constellations overhead.—Then, there was the heath that stretched seawards, with its broom and furze, its harebells and variety of heaths, with its intersecting paths, the greenest of the green. And again, there was the little wood, jutting down between the grass-land and the arable of the farm; and, though not belonging to it, as open to the family as if it was.

This little wood was the pride of them all. Ned knew more than he chose to tell anybody but his mother of the birds' nests in it, every spring. Dinah defended the daffodils there, which some persons presumed to despise: and year by year, more snow-drops showed themselves in the open places, and more primroses nestled in the recesses of the roots of the venerable trees.—Then, there was a curious old barn, on which the name of the place might throw some light. It was built of stone, had a steep high roof, and had certainly once been lighted by pointed arched windows, whose spaces had long been filled up with brick and mortar.

Now and then, a stranger with antiquarian tastes who had been visiting the ancient city of Norwich, and was on his way to the coast, in quest of sea breezes or old churches, would stop at the farm, and ask to look at the old barn, and measure the door-posts, and finger the little arches, and inquire for any traditions about the place. Then Mrs. Farn was ready and pleased to offer him new milk; and she could seldom help pointing out the eminence and the wood, with any light and shadow that might be upon them, and pressing him to say whether he had ever anywhere seen a spot so beautiful. Several such

visitors rather disappointed her by evading her inquiry, and giving merely general praise: but one or two she found more appreciative,—they assuring her that they had travelled far, and that there *was* nowhere else anything so beautiful as Maude-chapel farm. This she could always quote henceforward; and feel justified in admiring her home more and more, the longer she lived in it.

In one sense, it did become more worthy of her affection. It was a much improved place since she and her husband entered upon it, many years before. The farm consisted of 200 acres, with but little good land in it,—most of it being a light sandy soil. It was in low condition at first,—the land let down, the hedges in bad order,—the farm-buildings poor and dilapidated. For seven years, the farmer had held it at a very easy rent; and for the seven next had been able and willing to pay more. At the time of his death, he was paying a hundred and fifty pounds a year: and at this rent his widow and son now held it on a seven years' lease, and made it answer well. Of the 200 acres, 110 were arable: about 80 in grass and pasture; and the rest in hedge, ditch, and the scrubby wood natural to the district. The farmer had proved himself intelligent in the management of his business; and he had brought up his son

Henry to be as pains-taking as himself, and even more fond of the study of his occupation, by means of reading, and other methods of learning. As, year by year at first, more wild land was reclaimed, and made to bear what compensated for the cost bestowed upon it, so now, year by year, such land bore heavier crops, and supplied the means of further improvement.

The Farns' landlord when they entered was old Mr. Neville, whom everybody respected as a man and a landlord. He told them the disadvantages, as well as the advantages of the place, and, among the rest, that it was a bad neighbourhood for rabbits, from the nature of the soil: and that, when they had got the rabbits down, they would have to look that the hares did not increase upon them. He did not attempt to interfere with the natural right of the tenant to have the game on his farm; and, when his steward asked him whether he did not mean to reserve it to himself, said that he had no wish to do so, from the time he was permitted by law to buy game whenever he wanted it. The rabbits were rather troublesome to keep down: but it was part of the business of the farm, and it was done,—as regularly and effectively as rats are provided against in farms that border on rivers.—As for the game, it

caused little mischief. The farmer sometimes took out a certificate, and shot for his own amusement, and on his own account; and sometimes let the shooting over his farm; in the latter case always taking care that the renter was one who would not do him harm in one way, while, in another, benefiting him by reducing the hares and pheasants to a harmless amount.

There had been no trouble worth complaining of from the neighbouring land. It was, for the most part, the landlord's estate: and, when the old gentleman died, his agent and his management continued unchanged,—his heir being abroad for some years, on his foreign travels.

Dinah was a tall girl now,—old enough to give much help at home; but her mother had the self-denial to keep her at a good day-school three miles off, with her younger brother, till she was nearly seventeen. From the next Christmas she was to remain at home; and then Mrs. Farn knew she should never repent having allowed her daughter the opportunity of obtaining a good hand-writing, knowledge of accounts, and of needle-work, and so much taste for books as would make her an intelligent companion for her brother Henry, who was five years older. Henry

was so sober and thoughtful that his mother was almost too gay an associate for him, when his mind was full of business. His sister had gravity enough for him ; and between them, they would manage all serious affairs, while Mrs. Farn and Ned made as much cheerfulness as was wanted in the house.

When Dinah's school term was drawing to a close, she came in one afternoon in the dusk, wondering, from the time she entered the yard gate, to see her mother standing in the doorway of the house, in the full draught of the very cold wind. Dinah hastened, exclaiming as she approached

"Am I late, mother ? I thought I had walked fast ?"

"I dare say you did, my dear. I was only looking out for you, that 's all."

By the light from within, Dinah now saw in her mother's face that something good or something droll must have happened. Smiles were on her lips, and glittered forth from her eyes.

"Why, mother, what is it ?" cried Dinah.

Mrs. Farn laughed outright as she replied

"Why, yes,—there is something, dear. There are two things to tell you of. Go and find Henry"

"O ! then I know," exclaimed Dinah, clasping her hands in thankfulness.

"Well ! don't ask me, because I promised that Henry should tell you himself.—And Dinah !" she cried, as the breathless girl was flying off to seek her brother, "come back to me as quick as you can, for I have something else to tell you."

It was a good while before Dinah returned ; for Henry poured out his whole heart to her who had long sympathized in his humble and hopeless love. Hopeless they had both thought it,—so entirely unmoved and unimpressed had Fanny King appeared by the knowledge she could not but have had of his attachment, from their school days onwards. Mrs. Farn had always wished that Henry would ask his fate : and he had often planned to do, in despair, what his mother advocated in hope : but he had always felt repressed at the moment. The repression to-day had been beyond anything he had before experienced ; but happily it was critical. In desperation he explained himself ; and he came home happy, though fully convinced that he had been a cowardly fool for a long time past.

"How did he look when he came in, mother ?" asked Dinah, on returning from her long conversation with Henry. "It was so dark just now,

I could not see his face ; and I would not say a word about his coming in, for fear of stopping his talk. How did he look ? How did he tell you?"

" He was so white, I thought he was going to faint. I came into the room, just as he had dropped down on that chair. ' Why, Henry ! ' I said. ' Fanny King ! ' said he. ' Well, has she refused you ? ' I asked. ' No ! ' said he, like one astonished. I never shall forget the sound of that ' No ! ' So then I told him that if he had taken my advice, and if he had known his own merits better, he might have been as happy as he is now for a year or two past. However, it is all right now."

" But he says, mother, that they won't think of marrying for a length of time yet ;—not this twelvemonth, at least."

" I suppose he is right. I dare say he is; but it seems to me they have waited a long time already. It is like years and years since we went a drive one spring afternoon,—your father and he and I, to the beach, and he ran on before us,—getting into spirits on the shore : and when I came up behind him softly on the sands, I found him writing F. K. with a stick, over and over again, where the tide was coming up. Your father and I looked at one another, and knew what to

think from that day forward. But how very long that seems ago!—Well! he is full of happiness to-night; and that is enough.—And you, Dinah,—what will you think of having a sister, dear?”

Dinah sobbed with joy; and her mother laughed at her, while her own eyes were running over.

“Why, we are as foolish with our tears as ever Henry was with his blushes,” said she, brushing away the unwonted drops. “And did not I tell you that there is another piece of news to-day?”

“O yes! can there be any more good news left?”

“Yes indeed, my dear:—good for us, I hope; and the best news that could be for the neighbourhood. Mr. Neville is coming down to the Lodge.”

“What, to live?”

“It is said so. He will try it, at all events; and God grant he may like it well enough to stay!”

“I suppose it will be a good thing.”

“A great blessing indeed. Nobody will be out of work then. It will bring all manner of custom into the neighbourhood. Perhaps some servants will be wanted for the Lodge: and the dairy and the gardens and grounds will be got in order. And if they get up the game”

"Ah!" said Henry, who then came in, "that is the part of the business that I am least sure about."

"Why, it will employ so many people!" said the widow. "You know, the carrier was telling us, the other day, that there are nearly three hundred game-keepers in the next county. Then there are the numbers of men wanted, at the worst season of the year, for helpers to sporting gentlemen,—to beat for the game, and look after the horses and dogs, and so on. Think what a number of people this employs! O! if Mr. Neville and his friends spend the winters here, the country round will have a merry Christmas, and a happy new year. Eh! Henry?"

"Let us hope so, mother. But we get on pretty well at present, as things are: and that is more than they do in such places as I know where game is preserved."

"In those places, I fancy the tenants have not the liberty that we have over the game on our farm. It must be quite a different thing, you know, where the landlord reserves the game."

"O yes! that makes a vast difference," Henry agreed. "But if they let the game get up much in the covers, so near as they are to us, it will take a great deal of trouble to keep it within bounds."

"O ! Ned will help in that, and delight in it," declared his mother. "But where is Ned?" she asked of Dinah.

"He ran off from the school-door, with Joe Green and the Smiths," said Dinah. "I dare say they are in the wood, or somewhere about."

Henry went out, and whistled the shrill whistle which often brought the careless Ned home to meals, when he had forgotten all about the time.

"Henry does not want to be kept waiting for his tea," observed his smiling mother, "considering that he has a certain visit to pay afterwards. He shall tell the Kings that you and I will go over to-morrow. You have nearly done with school now, and I shall not mind your staying away for one morning. And we will fix a day for them all to come and dine; — the earliest day they can give us. But I wish Ned would come in."

In another moment Ned did come in, with great commotion,—rushing into the kitchen as if the catcher of the hindmost were at his heels. He and the Smiths and Joe Green had been ditch-leaping, all across the farm, till they found themselves on the heath, and it was too dark to do anything but come home. As they passed the new hedge, which the hedger had only just left,

they saw some people helping themselves with the stakes. Little Will Tucker was certainly one; and when the boys hallooed, and asked what business they had there, Mrs. Tucker was seen to let into the ditch a stake which she held; and then she came forward, and threatened the boys that if they dared to tell at home any lies about anybody having taken anything but ling off the common, they should be the worse for it. Joe Green had told her that he had seen her drop a stake into the ditch, and that he should let Henry Farn know it. Whereupon, Mrs. Tucker had called her husband, who came out of the ditch, with a stout stake, close upon the boys; and they had run all the way back, sure that Tucker would have beaten them within an inch of their lives, if he could have caught them.

"I must see after those people," declared Henry, taking down his hat, which he had hung up in hopes of his tea. "I can't go on always making new hedges in the day to be pulled to pieces in the night."

"Ah! once caught, those Tuckers will let us alone, I hope," said Mrs. Farn. "You think not?—Well, try what making them ashamed will do.—But, Henry, do take one of the men with you. I don't like to think of your going to meet

that fellow in the dark.—No, Ned, you won't do. You are not big enough for that yet; and you are young enough yet to be making yourself enemies, I'm sure. You will take Hooker, will you Henry? Very well. Make haste back: and we won't tell Ned any news, good or bad, till you come in."

CHAPTER II.

FIRST YEAR.

MR. NEVILLE came down to the Lodge, and staid there till the London season recalled him to town. He brought and entertained a good many friends; and he left behind him very distinct traces of his residence. He had kept open house at Christmas; had looked a little into his affairs, and approved of most that his steward, Mr. Cosby, had done; but had ordered alterations enough in the grounds to employ several labourers for some months to come; and had sent for and settled an accomplished gamekeeper from the other side of Norwich, who was to get up the game to a reasonable amount, observing strictly the promise made to the neighbouring farmers that they should not be injured by the game to any extent worth complaining of.

Mr. Neville hoped that by one device he had done his tenants some good, while saving his own purse. He gave over the rabbits to his gamekeeper, as a perquisite, thus, while reducing the

man's salary, providing, as he trusted, for the rabbits being pretty well cleared off,—the demand for them being considerable in Norwich, and in all the towns of the county. These arrangements made, he went away;—might pop down to the seaside in the summer,—or might not be seen again till the next shooting season.

He had not been long gone when a few incidents occurred which made some of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood feel that, however great might be the good of the landlord's residence, that good was not unmixed. On the very day of his departure, Henry was sending his sheep, as usual, by the way of the wood, from his sward land to his turnip field, when the shepherd came and told him that he could not get through the wood,—the gate being locked.

Henry went to the spot, and found this true. He called aloud, and his well-known neighbour, Tucker, appeared, to learn what was wanted.

“ Do you know,” said Henry, “ whether any of Mr. Neville's people are about ? ”

“ I am here. What do you want ? I am under-keeper at Mr. Neville's.”

“ You are ? Then can you tell me where I may find Mr. Cosby ? ”

"He is up at the Lodge. But if you mean about the locking of that gate, it is done by orders of Mr. Neville, that the game in this cover may not be disturbed."

"There is some mistake," said Henry. "I have a right of way through this wood."

"Well,—you can ask Mr. Cosby."

Mr. Cosby gave the same account of the matter. Mr. Neville's friend, Lord Z., when down the other day, advised him to make more use of his excellent covers, and orders were given accordingly to his head-keeper, who had engaged two under-keepers who knew the land and the game perfectly.

Henry smiled,—for Tucker was the most notorious poacher within twenty miles. No man indeed knew more of the land and the game.

These men had decided at once that the passage of sheep through the wood would disturb the game; and it could not be allowed.

"But," said Henry, "there is a right of way through that wood which has never been disputed. I am sure Mr. Neville cannot know that: nor that if I am prevented sending my sheep one hundred and fifty yards through that wood, I cannot get them upon my field without driving them more than half a mile round."

Mr. Cosby could only say his employer's orders were positive, that the gates should be locked ; and of course the sheep could not be let through. Henry took his landlord's present address, and went home, a good deal annoyed ; for the new arrangement made a very serious difference to him, and he could not be so sanguine as his mother about Mr. Neville's setting everything right by return of post.

In fact, it was not till after repeated applications, and the lapse of many weeks, that he obtained an answer at all ; and then it was merely a few lines referring him to Mr. Cosby.

Much dismay was caused one Sunday morning by such an event as had never been witnessed or heard of before by the oldest inhabitant. Some children, the oldest not above fifteen, the youngest nine, went out bird-nesting. Four of them got into the wood, saying that people always used to go there, and there was nothing but a gate to hinder them now. The others remained outside, being afraid of the keepers, and having some sense that it was wrong to go over locked gates. Their companions were bringing them a linnet's nest, and a miscellany of eggs in a handkerchief, when the halloo of a keeper was heard, and Tucker appeared. The boys scampered, and all but one

had cleared the gate when Tucker came up ; and that one was on the top bar. Tucker knocked him off, inside the gate, and struck him with his stick. As the man swore and threatened, and did not enjoy the good opinion of the neighbourhood, the children were afraid he would murder their comrade. They pelted him with stones which lay about. He did not stand this long, but retreated through the wood, shaking his stick at the intruders. They went homewards, sufficiently instructed against trespassing, and some two or three of the more timid doubting whether they had heard the last of it.

A very speedy certainty succeeded to this doubt. Before they reached the nearest of their homes, they were overtaken by the constable and the two under-keepers, and carried off to the house of a magistrate. Of course, they did not appear at home in time for church ; and their families went without them. It was in church that the report spread that several children were to be carried off to Norwich Castle, for an assault on Mr. Neville's keeper. All that day and the next, the parents tried in vain to obtain access to the boys, or to the magistrate. They were merely told through the medium of the butler, that the case would come on on Wednesday morning, when they

might attend. On Tuesday afternoon, however, they heard that the case had been heard that morning, the children fined ten pounds for the assault on the keeper, and, being unable to pay, were sent for a fortnight to the nearest House of Correction.

Every parent whose boys were safe at home that morning was duly thankful: and very serious were the warnings given against going near Mr. Neville's property. Ned Farn looked grave for a longer time than had ever been seen before: yet his mother, like many another mother, was anxious and alarmed if he was out of her sight for an hour that was unaccounted for.

One Saturday that spring, he had come in from school, and left his satchel; and, finding nobody in the kitchen, had gone out again. He did not appear at dinner,—nor at supper,—and Henry himself was growing uneasy when the boy's voice was heard without, in loud laughter with another. His mother laughed as heartily as he,—partly in sympathy, and partly from the relief to her fears. But Henry continued grave till he heard Ned's account of himself.

Ned came in, all glowing with delight, with a bat, trap and ball in his hands. He was as eager to tell his mother how he obtained these as she

was to hear. But he could not tell any body else;—not Henry, nor Dinah. He had, in fact, promised not to tell any body; but he never doubted his mother being always an understood exception.

His mother lost no time in giving him his supper, and getting him to bed, and then holding an anxious consultation with his brother and sister.

At school, a boy about Ned's age had told him that he knew how to get some money that very day, to buy a bat with. He had an errand to do for Mr. Neville, for which he was to be paid; and Ned and Joe Green should help him, and share the money, if they liked. Of course, they did like it: and Ned agreed,—only differing about going off straight from the school, or leaving word at home. He had deposited his satchel; and his companions would not wait longer. A gentleman, he was told, wanted some pheasants' eggs, and would take partridges' too, if they came in his way: and another gentleman had said, on another day, where such eggs were likely to be found. So the three boys set off for General White's woods, and Mrs. Gibson's fields; and they had found what they wanted. On their return, their leader bade them walk on along the road, while he carried in the eggs to the person who was to receive and

pay for them. Joe and Ned did walk on ; but they chanced to look behind them, and they saw that the man who came to unlock the gate was Tucker. This first made Ned uneasy about what he had been doing : but his comrade presently ran up, said all was right, showed them the money,—sixpence for every pheasants' egg, and three-half-pence for every partridge's,—and led the way to buy the bat and trap and ball, and the materials for a kite, which Ned engaged that Dinah would help to make.

“ I am so afraid,” said the widow, “ that this is a plot of Tucker's to get my poor boy into the House of Correction.”

Both son and daughter exclaimed against this idea.

“ Why, did not he say that he would be revenged on you ? Did not his wife say so, that night in the winter when you found her stealing your new hedge ? ”

“ Yes : but I don't think this affair has anything to do with that. I don't believe they knew that Ned was to be in this at all.—I think they are doing what is very common with that sort of people,—stocking our landlord's woods with eggs from other people's grounds.”

“ What ! Mr. Neville ! ” exclaimed Dinah.

"He does not know how it is done, of course. He directs his keeper to get up the game, as fast as he can, and then he goes away. The keeper hires men to help him; and it answers to him to take, for one, the most mischievous poacher he would otherwise be troubled by. He thus not only disarms him as a poacher on Mr. Neville's property, but learns from him more than any one else can tell of the game on other estates near."

"And then they seduce little boys to go and take eggs! What a shame!" cried his mother.

"It is an intolerable shame," said Henry, growing as warm as his mother. "To think of the hard measure used towards those that went only bird-nesting where they ought not, and now of this corrupting of boys,—bribing them to go and steal, besides trespassing! I had rather that Ned had pelted a dozen keepers than carried pheasants' eggs in his cap."

"What can be done?" asked Dinah, with a sigh.

"Suppose you write, and tell Mr. Neville the whole story," said his mother.

"I would, with all my heart, if it would do any good, mother. But I think it would do nothing but harm. A gentleman's tenants have no chance with him against his own servants. Tucker would

deny the whole, and make the boys out to be poachers and liars. And we have no proof to bring to the contrary. My opinion is that we had better be quiet. To-morrow is Sunday. It must be made a serious day to Ned. We must show him that he has been overtaken in a great fault,—betrayed into theft.”

“ You will never make him feel that. He knows he meant no harm: and he will tell you he has held our landlord’s money in his hand. And what can you answer to that?”

Henry sighed.—His mother, who never entertained a painful idea for a minute without looking round for a pleasant one, burst out with,

“ Well! there is the wedding at Christmas! That is a happy thing in store!”

Henry sighed again; and his mother looked up at him alarmed. She had never quite forgotten Fanny King’s long apparent indifference to Henry; and she mistrusted Fanny’s high spirit so far as that her fears were always up in arms for Henry on the barest imagination of anything going wrong.

Her son either knew this before, or saw it now in her startled look, for he smiled as he said

“ The wedding at Christmas depends on circumstances, you know, mother. Better not be sure

till harvest whether it will be at Christmas or later."

"O! that's all! There never was a farmer yet, as I used to tell your father, who did not doubt every year whether he should have a harvest. He doubted it many a time; yet we almost always did very well; and so will you. So, don't get into a desponding habit, Henry."

"Indeed, mother, I don't know that I ever desponded in my life, except"

"Ah! except about Fanny King; and what else have you ever had an opportunity to despond about, I should like to know? O! Henry, that ought to be a lesson to you!"

"So it should, mother. So I won't despond about the harvest, — (which, indeed, I never thought of doing,) but see what can be done about our wheat. It does not look a bit better as time gets on, but worse and worse."

"It made my heart ache to see it, a month ago," said the widow: "and I am almost afraid to look at it now. So the rabbits are at it still."

"Yes, and will be. They bite their way through it, right and left. In some parts, it is laid waste a foot or more, on each side the furrow. When I was in the field early this morning, I gave a loud

halloo, and the little vermin started out by scores, and off into the wood."

"How they seem to have increased! and so suddenly!"

"Nothing like rabbits for that. A couple may come to fifteen in a season: and if it was difficult to keep them down before, I see little chance for us now that they are made the keeper's property. Of course, he will be willing enough to let them increase, while it is only the tenants that suffer by them. The mischief they have done to the tares is extreme; but the damage to the wheat is the most serious. They eat what they like, and destroy many times over as much as they eat."

"What would Mr. Neville say, if he knew?" said Dinah.

"He would say he had done the best he could for us, and we must do the best we can for ourselves, by taking the creatures on our own land. We have done that. We spend more time and labour than I like to give in snaring and ferreting them, when we can get at them. And it seems just so much pains thrown away, by the swarms that come on the land, after all."

"So the rabbits are eating up what ought to furnish the house against Christmas," said Dinah: "That does seem hard."

"I wish it may not turn out worse than that," said her brother. "What I doubt is about improving, or even keeping up, the condition of the farm next year."

"O! never fear!" said the widow. "As for the furnishing, your father and I were very happy with the house as it is now"

"Why, not quite, mother," said Henry, smiling, and looking round him. "You had the same furniture, but it was rather newer before I was born."

"Well! and you will have everything new and nice, the first prosperous year, as you will see.—And as for keeping up the condition of the farm, we have never failed to do that yet: and I don't believe we shall now.—To-morrow is Sunday, my dears. We should not carry any distrustful thoughts into the day of rest: and for such a cause as rabbits, of all creatures!"

Henry smiled, and she hoped she had set his mind at ease.

Such was the promise of the spring at Maude-chapel farm.

As the summer came on, Henry found his temper more tried than it had ever been in his life. He seemed no longer to have his farm to

himself, in this year of all years when he meant to do some good and clever things of his own devising. His temper did not give way, however. He now bore in his heart a support and a hope which sustained him in even the smallest vexations, as well as in some which were serious enough. His mother was pulled two ways by her two strong desires,—to discountenance the fact that his business was not going on so well as usual, and to point out to Fanny King how admirable his temper was under provocation. Her usual method was to laugh and be sure that if ever man was made for prosperity, it was Henry, while in private she worked hard, and trained Dinah to work hard,—saved carefully every shilling she could in every department under her management,—and took Ned from school,—not merely for economy, as she said to herself, but because she really believed a thoughtless and playful boy like Ned was safer in his brother's employ on the farm than among school-fellows who had once led him to poach, and might seduce him into further mischief.

Some good many hares, and rabbits innumerable continued to make their way through the corn, destroying it wherever they wanted to travel: and pheasants harboured in it, unmoved by the

crow-boy, who could prevent birds pitching upon the wheat, but could not take any measures against such as were in it. Henry now and then took up a gun to make war on the crows. Ned would have liked to be charged with this part of the business of the farm: and when the pigeons from General White's woods began to attack the peas, he begged to bang at them for one single morning: but he was pronounced too young and careless at present, and was told that he must be at least a year older, and very much wiser before he could be permitted to let fly a single shot. Meantime, he was indulged with having the dogs given into his charge; and his great delight was in petting and training them. Nor did he disdain a humbler sort of favourite. His mother was very fond of her house cat: and she rather encouraged Ned in bringing up a family of kittens to mouse in the barn and sheds: and with every one of this useful family Ned was on terms of discriminating intimacy.

One day, when Henry was shooting crows, he heard a call behind him. On looking round, and seeing that it was Tucker, he took no notice; for it was now a very frequent occurrence for him to meet, or be followed by this man. It was usually on the boundary of the farm that they met, as

Henry had the right of the game on his occupation : but there were so many ins and outs in the fields and woods of the two occupations, that Tucker could be almost incessantly in view, or could, out of sight, have his eye continually on the proceedings of Henry's people. To-day, he was actually in the field ; and he walked up rapidly towards Henry. When he came near, he suddenly stopped, and seemed about to return on his steps, but changed his mind, saying as he approached,

"I thought it was your youngster, popping away. I could not have thought it was you."

Henry made no answer, but by a shot which brought down a crow.

"There ! that will do, for this month or two to come," said Tucker. "Put him up to scare the rest, and they will keep off till he decays. Hie home, man, and lay up your gun, and don't be disturbing my master's game."

"Don't come and talk to me," said Henry. "I shall take care of my own crop in my own way."

"I must tell the head keeper," said Tucker. "We can't have our game disturbed. I must tell the keeper."

"Pray do : and he will tell you that it is my own business when and what I shoot on this farm. You may walk off, Tucker."

The head keeper met Henry in the course of the day. He was civil, but said that neighbours should accommodate, and that any one shooting so near the covers did disturb the game, and he hoped Henry would consider this.

Henry said he regarded himself as a very accommodating neighbour, much against his will. The grain and other crops which he had sown, on land which he had manured, went, in a large proportion, to feed the hares and pheasants which came from Mr. Neville's covers, and the rabbits which belonged to Mr. Neville's keeper . . .

“Nay,” said the keeper. “They belong to you on your land. You have nothing to do but to take them, if you choose.”

“You know that is not possible,” said Henry. “You know they come down in the night in swarms, and go back into your covers in the day,—besides all I see between sunrise and sunset. We take all the rabbits we can spare time to take, time which I ought not to have to spend in any such way; and yet my fields are all alive with them often and often, when I take a chance look at them. And last night, at sundown, I saw as many as twenty hares sitting under your cover yonder: and this morning early I counted sixty pheasants feeding in my ten-acre field. If I do

take out a certificate, and shoot in the season, what can my gun do against such an enemy as that,—hatched on another's grounds, though fed in mine?—to say nothing of their having first spoiled my harvest for this year?"

The keeper replied that he really did not see how any man need complain who had power over the game on his own land,—to keep it down and destroy it as he chose; and off he went, after a civil good morning.

When the hay crop was beginning to be cut, Henry saw Tucker, from a distance, talking with his mowers. Henry went down, knowing that wherever Tucker was, there was mischief.

"What is this for?" said Henry, finding a patch of the grass standing up uncut. It was a ring left round a partridge's nest, which had sixteen eggs in it. The mowers said that Tucker had advised them to leave such nests for the birds to hatch off, which must happen soon; and perhaps the mowers would find themselves the better at the end of their job, for every nest they left undisturbed.

Henry set his foot on the eggs, and told the men that, close as they were to his landlord's covers, the nests in this field were his. He had no intention of rearing vermin on his land, eaten up as he

was by that which came from elsewhere; and he offered a shilling for every nest which should be pointed out to him or his brother during the mowing.

This inspired Ned with the idea of training his little dog Prick to find nests. He thought he could do it by time and pains, so that by next year, Prick should lead him to every nest on the farm.

“Try,” said his brother. “ You shall have your share of whatever you save upon the farm by keeping down the pheasants. But, remember, Ned, it must be on the farm, and the farm alone. We have no right over any nests elsewhere. I think you will take care to prevent Prick’s straying; for, as sure as fate, you will lose him, if you let him do mischief.”

Ned promised, and immediately began to train Prick.

Henry kept down his feelings of irritation at being perpetually interfered with by the keepers, by the same talisman which now preserved him unharmed amidst all troubles. He recurred to the thought of Fanny King.

“She loves me! She loves me!” said he, dwelling on the words of magic joy. “Happen what may, she loves me! I have one for my own: and

such an one! How can it be! But it is really true. It is enough, happen what may."

Thus passed the summer at Maude-chapel farm.

The autumn was far from being the cheerful season that it ought to be in ordinary years, when the fruits of the earth are gathered in under a genial sun. The sun of this harvest was genial. All the influences of nature were as favourable as in any former year: but the widow herself could not but admit that never had she found it less easy to be merry at the harvest-home. The deficiency in the crops was so great, from the ravages of the rabbits and game, that she could not say that Henry ought to marry this Christmas, if he himself thought that he should not. Fanny King had been used to every comfort that persons in their rank are wont to enjoy; and it had been Henry's hope and thought of pride that he should bring her to a home which might compare favourably with that she had left. If he could not this year accomplish this ambition, his mother felt that she could say nothing against his waiting. Never at a loss for hope, however, the widow trusted that Fanny King would find means to intimate to her revering lover that she meant to marry him for himself, and had rather share his lowered

fortunes than wait to be endowed with such as were good.

"Do take out a certificate, and shoot down all you can: and I wish I could help you," she said to her son, in her restlessness to be doing something, when they were estimating their losses, after harvest. "And as for the rabbits, cannot we defend ourselves better against them?"

"Our men are wiring and trapping, morning and evening;—have been for months past, and must be, more and more, for the turnips' sake, as the year gets on: but it seems all of little use. If the keeper chooses to let them increase, we cannot keep them down."

"Suppose you write to Mr. Neville about it."

"He answers no letters of that kind, or not to any purpose. But I will see him when he comes down to shoot."

"Do, my dear. And tell him we could get seven or eight sacks of wheat to the acre, (though the land is none of the best,) but for the game. Tell him we did, before this year; and that this year we have under six."

"I will. And I must show him how the farm will suffer, if we cannot do more than turn ourselves round in it."

"That's right. And I dare say you will find

him reasonable enough. He will compensate you, I dare say."

Henry shook his head.

"What do you do that for, Henry? Why should not he make it up to us, when he sees he has injured us?"

"He must excuse our whole rent, and more, to make it up to us; and no landlord thinks of doing that for such a reason."

"But cannot you give him a hint,—just drop a gentle hint, you know, about an action for damages?—I mean, if you find he won't listen to you without."

"No, because he knows that I could not bring an action. I have all the law can give me now, in having the right to kill on my own farm."

"Then there ought to be a better law," said the widow. "I've no notion of a law that pretends to protect us, and then lets us be eaten out of house and home."

"Well, that time is not come yet," observed Dinah. "We have a home, dear mother."

"Yes, thank God, we have, my dears; and a very happy one, I'm sure,—for all a few losses now and then. We'll make it up next year, Henry, depend upon it."

Henry did not reply; for he did not see how,

with above £150 deficient, which he had hoped to put into the land, he could expect to prosper better. He could not see how he could help falling back, unless he could induce some great change in Mr. Neville's proceedings.

Mr. Neville seemed in no degree disposed to make any change whatever in his proceedings. He was not uncivil to his tenant, but seemed to consider him strangely insensible to the benefits he derived from his landlord's game preserving.

" You must find my keepers a great protection to your property. You ought to bear that in mind, I think."

Henry looked surprised.

" Do you not find it a substantial protection to your hen roosts to have my people about,—like a sort of rural police? And to your hedges, and your property generally? And is it not a check upon the morals of the people in your fields to know, at all times when they are at work, that the keepers may be looking at them?"

Henry could only say that they had done very well before the game was preserved. He did not choose to tell what he knew about who the hedge stealers were formerly who did not pilfer them now.

"And then there are the rats and other vermin that the keepers make war against—it must be a benefit to you, Farn, to be rid of them."

"We could keep them under for ourselves, Sir, as we always did before : and I must say I would rather have to deal with a dozen rats to every couple of your keeper's rabbits, than with the rabbits that are eating us up."

"It is the rabbits that you complain of ?"

"Chiefly. We have much injury from hares too. But hares never amount to any very great number where rabbits abound as they do here."

"And the partridges ?"

"They are of little consequence to us. I do not wish to make any complaint about them."

"And the pheasants ?"

"They have damaged me much."

"I thought pheasants were the farmers' best friends. Do they not save you from much damage from the wire-worm and other enemies ?"

"We have not been troubled with the wire-worm since your pheasants were so increased. And among so many good friends as you seem to think I have, Sir, I find myself very badly used. The upshot is, that my crops are sadly deficient this year,—to more than the amount of my rent, Sir."

"That cannot be from the game, Farn. You must be laying to the charge of the game the damage owing to other causes."

"I do not know of any other new causes of injury this year, Sir; while I do know that the pheasants have picked off the green wheat, and fed upon the seed first, and then the grain abundantly, before and during harvest. I do know that hares and rabbits have made lanes through my corn, and almost laid the field bare near the cover; and that they have destroyed the tares, this year. After seeing these things with my own eyes, I find that instead of above seven sacks to the acre, I have, taking the whole field together, under six.—And at this very same time, if you would trouble yourself, Sir, to inquire,—without getting me into difficulty with your people,—how much the Norwich carrier alone has paid your head keeper for rabbits this year, I think you will find which way my property has gone."

"I can easily do that, Farn. And if I find . . . But I am persuaded you exaggerate these things to yourself,—which I allow to be very natural. Another year, I hope . . . "

Henry waited a moment, and no further speculation being offered, proposed his.

"Another year, Sir, with this increase of the

rabbits, would half ruin my mother and me. If our turnips this winter”

“ Well, well ; I will see about it. I have no intention that my tenants shall be injured by the game. I will speak about the rabbits, and see how it is, if they have really not been kept down as I intended. That was the very intention of my giving them to my keeper.”

“ I know it, Sir : and that is why I ventured to tell you that the plan has worked the other way.”

“ I have listened to you this time, Farm : and I beg it may be the last on this subject. If I had reserved the game on your farm, for myself or my lessee, there might have been some colour for your coming to me to complain. But you, the occupier, holding the game with the land, have a great privilege, and one which is not very common ; and”

“ But, Sir, it is the tenant’s right, by the law, unless he gives it away.”

“ Practically, you know, very few tenants hold it. The landlord reserves the game, almost as a matter of course, both in leases and in verbal agreements. The least I could have expected for myself, from your having such an advantage, is that I should be spared complaints about the

game. You must protect your own crops, Farn, and let me hear no more about them."

And so ended the autumn at Maude-chapel farm,—leaving its impress not only on the fortunes of the family, but on their landlord's opinion of them. He desired his keeper so to bring down the rabbits as that there might be no cause for complaint on the part of the tenants: but he agreed with the keeper that young Farn was a litigious, disagreeable fellow to have to deal with. At the end of the season, he inquired of the carrier, as he had promised, about the amount that the keeper had received from him for rabbits, and swore and laughed when he heard it was above one hundred and fifty pounds; and a comparison of this amount with the Farns' rent and the Farns' losses just crossed his mind: but the next moment he told a friend at his elbow that he was a lucky fellow to have no tenants: for that they were saucy prigs who would stand up for themselves against their landlord, and waste his morning in selfish complaints when he had something else to do than be troubled with them. He had tried speaking them fair at first, in compassion for their ignorance of manners: but that would not do at all. He had learned that the only way was to send them to the right about.

Henry made such provision as he could for the security of his turnips, by stacking his Swedes pretty early in November. Even then, he found them attacked by the hares and rabbits ; but he hoped the bites would skin over, and the turnips be no worse, as they were secured before the frost. As for the white turnips, they must take their chance on the ground.—And a very poor chance it was, as Henry soon saw, when the frost came.

His sheep were on the heath during the day, and were turned upon the turnips at night ;—in which process, the loss of the right of way through the wood was a serious inconvenience. The turnips soon showed signs of decay ; and half of them rotted, from the frost seizing on such as were bitten. It was a matter of serious and threatening consequence to the farm to lessen its stock : but what else could be done ? The original number of sixty sheep had been gradually increased to a hundred and twenty ; and it had been Henry's hope to increase it yet further. But his turnip crop so failing him, he could not afford their feed. Unwilling that the land should lose the benefit of their manure, he turned them upon the young wheat,—a proceeding which nothing but extreme pressure for food for his stock could have recon-

ciled him to. But there again, the enemy had been before him. The hares and rabbits had bitten the blade off closer than the sheep could have done ; and there seemed little hope that the portions of the fields which lay near the covers would return the seed, or produce anything worth the reaping.

Even Mrs. Farn looked rueful when the turnips began to go ; for she was aware of the downward course thus indicated :—deficient feed, diminished stock :—diminished stock, insufficient manure :—insufficient manure, scanty crops :—scanty crops, restricted returns :—restricted returns, less employment of labour :—less employment of labour, increased poor-rate, misery and crime ;—land, tenant and labourer all going down in succession.

“ What is to be done ? ” she asked in dismay, as the family sat together one evening in that Christmas week which was to have been the wedding-week.

“ Now, mother, I must bid you hope, as you have often bid me,” said Henry. “ We must try to stop ourselves in this downward course, and trust that those of our neighbours, who suffer as we do ”

“ Nobody suffers as we do, Henry.”

"We do happen to be the nearest to the covers, certainly : but the whole neighbourhood is the worse for this sudden getting up of the game. I have been thinking that we must make a stand against the enemy. We must lay out some money in hurdles,—close hurdles,—such as will keep out the four-footed game, at least."

"My dear, it will be such a cost!"

"It will: and I only think of hurdling the wheat just round beside the cover; and one bit more ;—half an acre or so, in the middle of the field, for an experiment. If I can bring my landlord to the spot before harvest, to see the difference that I expect there will be between that half acre and all the rest, I cannot conceive how he can refuse either to give us compensation, or to lower our rent; or at least to change his plans about the rabbits and hares."

Here was ground enough for hope for such a temper as Mrs. Farn's. Henry was so clever and sensible, all would go well with him, in spite of a disaster, now and then. She was sorry now that they had been so scrupulous about his marrying this winter. She should have been better pleased with Fanny if she had

"No, no, mother!" expostulated Henry.
"Fanny is"

He stopped.

"Well, my dear son, I dare say you know best. But I won't promise to say so, this day twelvemonth, if you are not married long before that."

There was a pause, after which she resumed ;

"To be sure, it does not much matter what I say or do not say ; for I am sometimes terribly wrong, I must own. A year ago, how confident I was that Mr. Neville's coming to the Lodge would be a great blessing ! How I bade you all be glad of it !"

"I am sure it was dull enough before he came," said Ned. "'Tis capital fun to follow the gentlemen, when they are out shooting. And the keeper promised that I should be one of the beaters, one day soon. And there will be plenty of coursing this winter,—Hurra !"

And he jumped from his stool, and whirled round on his heel.

His mother and brother looked at each other, but made no remark, seeing that this was not the time for it. But they determined to find something for Ned to do which should hinder his going out to beat for game,—a service which would bring him into company with those who were or had been poachers, and would, by showing him

where the game lay, offer too strong a temptation to a boy of his temperament to turn poacher himself.

In such prospects and such cares passed the winter at Maude-chapel farm.

CHAPTER III.

SECOND YEAR.

NED did not grow happier as he grew up. He had always thought he should: but, somehow, everything appeared to fall out so as to vex him. In other words, his temper did not improve, but the contrary. He felt himself watched; and that was disagreeable; and the more because it reminded him of the reason;—that he had gone out with the keepers, without leave, knowing that it was against his mother's wish. Though nobody at home was in good spirits, this winter, there were more little excursions made than he had ever known before,—a trip to Norwich, (not on market day)—a trip to the coast, to see the lighthouse,—a trip across the country to a nursery ground, on some business about seeds and seedlings:—and these trips, which Ned would otherwise have waved his hat and hurraed over, always happened on the days when Mr. Neville went out with a great shooting party: so that Ned could not help

thinking that they were arranged for the purpose of getting him out of the way of the pleasure he liked the best in the world. So, when he had to drive his sister, he drove sullenly and perversely: and when he had to open gates for his brother driving Fanny King, he did it lazily, and tried to skulk behind, and turn back. He did not clap his hands at the sight of the beautiful Norwich spire, as formerly, nor laugh at everything he saw in the city, so as to be nearly run over, now and then, in the narrow streets: nor did he show any pleasure at the sparkling sea, nor breast the strong wind on the shore, nor leap, in a series of kangaroo jumps, down the cliff, from the light-house wall down to the sands. He usually recovered himself before he got home, and sometimes drove up with a dash and waving of hat, and splendid bows to any one who might be at window or door: but his associations with these expeditions were not happy and simple: and his loving mother more than once sighed as she looked after him, and feared he was losing his fine spirits already, and wished he could be happy without ever speaking to the keepers.

Then, again, she had a sorry satisfaction at times in seeing Ned more angry with the keepers than he had ever been with anybody at home.

He had been grieved enough when the sheep were sold, and had gone in a passion to the head-keeper, to reproach him with it,—to his brother's great vexation: but far worse was the mourning over his cats, as they disappeared, one by one. He found one in the keeper's vermin rack, in the cover, and ran home to tell his mother. Henry would not let him make any complaint, saying that if he could not keep his cat from trespassing in the cover, he must not quarrel with her fate. It was the keeper's business to preserve the game from vermin,—from rats that would destroy the eggs, and cats that would learn to prowl, so as to be dangerous to the young birds when hatched. Ned submitted, but did not feel his friendship with the keepers improved.—Soon after, he missed another cat which never appeared again; and then he set his teeth, and vowed vengeance against somebody.—Once more, he found a third trapped in a fence of his brother's. Away he flew with it to the keeper, who patted him on the shoulder, and said he would excuse his anger, but it was nobody's fault. The poor thing had certainly got into a rabbit snare, when she should have staid at home in the barn. 'Twas a silly cat to roam, instead of mousing in the barn. Ned felt as if he were a silly boy to go home with no better story

than this : but what could he do ?—So he devoted himself a good deal to his solitary cat in the barn, amusing her there, to the waste of much precious time (which nobody complained of because it was certain not to last long) and running off from his business, several times in the day, to see whether his cat was safe at home. As was foreseen, this did not last. Both this cat and his mother's old tortoise-shell were missing one morning. Mrs. Farn and Henry merely agreed that there was no use in complaining : everybody knew that there was no keeping cats near a game-preserve, and that the mice must now play as they liked in the house and barn. Dinah dropped a few tears over the stocking she was mending ; and Ned did not speak a word all day,—only stamped now and then with his foot, and shook his fist in the air.

Fond as Ned was of his cats, they were not his chief pets. Dear Prick was his chief pet. Henry's two rat dogs were nice fellows, and extremely useful ; but there never was such a dog as Prick. He was the smallest and prettiest creature ! so that not only gentlemen and ladies who came to see the chapel admired him, but the men in the fields looked off their work and laughed when they saw him exploring for nests, and watching

and obeying every look of Ned's. His training was such that by the spring he could point out any bird's nest on a thorn and, Ned declared, jump up where there was a tomtit's in a hole in a pollard. Some people laughed at this: but Ned protested its truth. Many a warning had Ned about this dog, as gamekeepers are not particularly fond of other people's dogs that are clever at finding nests: and so tired did Ned become of such constant warning that he one day asked whether he was not fonder of his dog than anybody, and whether anybody ever saw him happy when the dog was out of his sight,—and whether he did not shut him up on Sundays, as he was neither permitted to take Prick to church, nor to stay at home with him? Yet, in spite of so much warning, he could not tell, one day at dinner time, where Prick was; nor could he conceive. He went about searching and calling, and, when obliged to dine, made all haste, that he might renew the search. Henry, meantime, learned from one of the farm servants that he had seen Prick run over to the cover at noon, when the keepers were there. Had any shot been heard? O yes, several: but that was nothing uncommon.—Henry made bold to enter the cover, and look about. There he found a place where the earth

was trampled. He thrust in his stick,—found that something was buried there; and presently turned up the body of poor Prick, riddled with shot. He was startled by a scream of anger and grief while he was examining the carcase. He would have buried it again, if Ned had not come, and have let it be supposed that the dog was lost: but Ned was at his elbow; and it was too late. The dog was carried home; and all endeavoured to engage the boy's mind with objects of business and pleasure; but it was in vain. Never for an hour did Ned forget his matchless Prick; and never, through life, did his temper recover the injury caused by his death. He was now less at ease in his feelings towards the keepers than towards his own family: and he became less and less amiable at home, and more frequently absent for hours together, of which he gave no account.

Meantime, the hurdles had done some good. Along the side of the cover where they were planted, the injury to the wheat was not nearly so great as it had been the preceding year in the other field which was this year in clover. But the clover suffered much, and it was plain that if it was to be succeeded by barley, there would be no chance for a crop without some such expensive process of exclusion of the enemy as ought not to

be imposed on any farmer without large consideration in his rent.

Mr. Cosby agreed in this, one day just before harvest, when he came down to speak to the tenant. He had heard complaints from the keepers of the sauciness and stinginess of young Farn; and, being sent with a message from the landlord, was not sorry to gratify his curiosity by looking over the farm with Henry.—Nothing struck him so much as the sight of the crop within the hurdles, on the half-acre in the middle of the field. There the wheat grew up strong, thick, even and well ripened; while, just outside the hurdles, it was comparatively weak, very thin, and, where the four-footed game had travelled through it, so bitten off and laid bare, that the stalks might almost be raked up.

“ You see,” said Henry, “ that the hares do the further mischief of letting in the winged game. The birds leave the well-grown wheat for the thin parts: and if the whole field were (as it ought to be) like this half acre, they would hardly come at all.”

“ I see,” said the steward. “ It is very striking, I admit: and I am of opinion that some abatement should be made in your rent, in consideration of such damage as this.”

"That is well spoken, Mr. Cosby, like a candid man. Shall I furnish you with an estimate after harvest, of my losses, this year and the last?"

"Why, I don't know about coming to such close quarters as that,—considering that your landlord has not the game on your farm. But I will come down again after harvest, and see . . ."

"Ah! do; and bring Mr. Neville with you, if you can possibly persuade him to come,—for a day's shooting, or any reason he pleases."

"Well; I'll see. Meantime, he would be glad if you would keep to the old method of reaping your corn, instead of mowing it. This is a condition made with all our new tenants now: and we hope you will not set an example to the contrary, before their eyes. It cannot make much difference to you, waiting for the rest of the straw till October: and after September, you can do as you please."

"It is not the straw that signifies most to me," said Henry. "It is the length of time that reaping takes over mowing. That may be a serious matter if we have variable weather while we are getting in the crop."

"You must please yourself, of course," said Mr.

Cosby. " You are not bound, as the new tenants are: and the game in the stubbles is your own; only "

" I was thinking," said Henry, " what concern any one has with the game in my stubbles."

" O ! we ask you for the sake of example, and because I suppose you must be glad of opportunities of obliging your landlord. The keepers do say that whatever game is in your stubbles must be ours, because they know you tread on all the eggs you find in the season. But I know keepers pretty well, and "

" Tell me then," said Henry, " how they can ask me to support your game, when they know how I kill off my own?"

" It has gone too far, I admit, Mr. Farn. I will speak about it, and see what can be done. I shall advise that there be some abatement in your rent."

Soon after Mr. Neville had arrived for the September shooting, Henry met Mr. Cosby on the road. He asked,

" Am I to have the honour of seeing my landlord on my farm, one day soon, Mr. Cosby?"

" Why, I don't know, Farn. But I have spoken about the rabbits."

"But have you asked him to come and see me?"

"Yes: but the truth is, Farn, he is not pleased about the hurdles. The keepers look upon that sort of precaution as mean, you know."

"But Mr. Neville himself told me to protect myself. He said I had the power, and must use it. And he refused to listen to my complaints,—to speak or hear another word on the subject,—on the very ground that it was my business to protect myself."

"You have the power, of course. But it is customary to oblige the landlord about the game. You see, it was not his doing that the game on your farm was not reserved to him."

"I see," said Henry, after musing a moment.
"I will write to him."

"What now?" thought Mr. Cosby, as Henry walked away with a thoughtful countenance.

Henry's note to Mr. Neville procured him an interview.

"Good morning, Mr. Farn," said the landlord.
"What is this plan of yours about my having the game on your farm?"

"I will explain, Sir. I find my having the game is of little or no use, while there is so much in your covers,—and, yet more, so many rabbits

in the neighbourhood. Last year, I lost more than my rent, before my turnip crop was injured. This year . . .”

“ What a bore !” thought Mr. Neville. “ Cosby is the man to hear all this sort of thing. But I will let him talk, till he comes to his proposal about the game.”

“ This year, matters are worse,” continued Henry. “ On our turnip crop, as everybody knows, our fortunes for the whole year depend. Mine failed ; and my stock is so reduced that the tillage of the whole farm is let down by it.”

“ There are ways, Farn, as everybody knows, of preserving turnips from both game and frost.”

“ Very expensive ways, Sir. And, as to the game, the next consequence is that they go the more to the young wheat. The season has been an average season. There has been neither drought nor wet ; neither wire-worm nor fly, nor enemy of that kind. Yet we have lost, by the mere calculable damage, above £300.”

“ There must be some mistake about that, Farn.”

“ Thanks to a suggestion of yours, Sir, I have proof that there is no mistake. You told me that I must protect myself : and, in order to that, I planted hurdles . . .”

"O! I know all about that. You need not go into that now."

"May I ask if you know it from Mr. Cosby, as well as from the keepers?"

"Yes, yes. Cosby told me something about it. It gave me an idea, I must say, Farn, of pretty close shaving on your part."

"Perhaps you will tell me, Sir, how much faster than at present you would have my mother and her family go to ruin. We are half ruined now, in two years. You bid us protect ourselves from this ruin, and then accuse us of close shaving."

"I beg your pardon, Farn, if I have hurt you. I did not mean that. But I think there must be some mistake."

"You will permit me to show you that there is none. Our rent is one hundred and fifty pounds. Our rates and taxes are forty pounds. I can prove that our losses from rabbits and game are half as much again as our rent and taxation together. Before last year, we got seven or eight sacks of wheat to the acre: and now, this year, the average is under five."

"For all your hurdling!"

"For all our close shaving. The close shaving seems to us to be all on the other side; for on

some parts of our land, there has been really nothing to reap : and on others, the crop has not returned the seed sown. Our carrot crop ”

“ Nay, nay, Farn, Cosby is the person to whom you should give all these details.”

“ I have your permission, then, to furnish a valuation of damage to Mr. Cosby.”

“ Why, I think we may manage a more amicable-looking settlement than that. It is Cosby’s opinion that your rent ought to be reduced, and it shall be ; and there ’s an end.—What is it you wish to say to me about my having the game on your farm ? ”

“ That my mother and I shall be glad to give up the farm as soon as you will permit us to quit.”

“ Nonsense, Farn ! I tell you, your rent shall be reduced.”

“ We would not take it rent-free, Sir, if the thing were now to do. If you let us quit, you can take the game, and do what you will with the farm. In our hands, if you compel us to stay, it will go down to no value at all.”

“ You do not mean to threaten that, Farn ? ”

“ We cannot help ourselves, Sir. The land is of a light quality, requiring good farming. I have put more manure than my neighbours,—thirty-six

cart-loads to an acre, latterly : and for this I have kept more stock in proportion,—upwards of thirty head of cattle, and one hundred and twenty sheep. My turnips, carrots and clover being so eaten up, my sheep are reduced to the number my father brought on the farm, and must go down this year again, if I have no better treatment from the game : and all my stock must go down in proportion. I cannot manure my land, you see, Sir : and, if you hold us to our lease, we must get what we can out of the land, with the least labour and expense, and try whether we can hold out till we may quit.”

“ It is the rabbits ; it is all the rabbits,” pronounced Mr. Neville. “ I made a mistake in giving them as a perquisite, which I thought would have the effect of keeping them down. The fellow has made such a profit of them that I shall have to pension him off : and so, I can’t afford, you see, to let my tenants quit before their lease is expired. But your rent shall be reduced, for the current year at least.”

“ If you would permit us to quit in March . . . ”

“ Now, don’t be foolish, Farn ! The rabbits shall be destroyed.”

“ What news ? ” asked the widow, as Henry

entered his own door. And Fanny King, who was there, said as much by her look up at him.

"O' well!" said his mother, on hearing his story: "I think you have gained a great deal. I am glad you went. We shall do now. It has been a sad season for you young people, to be sure. My heart has ached for you. But now it will be very different. And we have not to leave the dear old place, thank God!"

Henry had an intimation, very soon, that his rent was to be reduced two shillings an acre, for the current year, this being just double the reduction Mr. Neville had ever made to any tenant, on account of the game.

"Two shillings an acre!" exclaimed his mother; "Twenty pounds! And is that all, to set against the three hundred pounds we have lost?"

"Such is our landlord's idea of justice," said her son.

"But then, there is the destruction of the rabbits, we must remember," said the widow. "That will be a great thing for us!"

It was a curious scene, that of the destruction of the rabbits, during the fortnight devoted to it. Every spare hand was engaged in it; and the trapping, ferreting and shooting were prodigious.

It was hearty work, in which the neighbours were happy to assist,—so hated were these vermin,—unconscious of evil as the poor little animals were. The heath and the covers were all alive with the beaters and spectators,—all echoing with shots, shouts and laughter; though there were a few who looked grave at the amount of game, properly so called, which came to light in the pursuit of the rabbits.

The gossips of the neighbourhood, and some who were not gossips, felt great interest in the dark question what the keeper had received for rabbits, up to this Christmas. It was known that he had been paid ninepence a head by one higgler for 2,800, between September and Christmas of this year: and with how many more purchasers he had dealings, no one knew but himself. Another curious question was, how Mr. Neville and he had settled the matter; how he could have been reconciled to the loss or diminution of such a perquisite. The only reply was, that this was an affair between him and his master.

Henry and Fanny did not marry this Christmas. Mrs. Farn still thought they might; and Henry might have yielded to his hopes and his wishes, but for the grave looks of Fanny's father, and his ever-growing reverence and tenderness for herself,

which made him recoil from bringing her down from a situation of ease into one of care, and pinching economy, and steady decline of fortunes. He had a strong conviction that she would have married now, at a word from him, though his mother dropped a reproach of Fanny's pride and high spirit, now and then. But that word Henry would not speak.

CHAPTER IV.

THIRD YEAR.

"I HAVE seen such a beautiful sight, mother!" exclaimed Henry, one day at the end of the winter. " You must let me drive you over to the Watkins' farm, the first day we can spare."

" I was wondering where you were gone, all this morning," said his mother.

" 'Tis a morning well spent, mother. I only wish I had gone weeks ago; for it is weeks now since Mr. Watkins told me of their wire-fence. That is what I have been seeing."

" And what is it like?"

" It is a pretty sort of wire-fence, such as looks well in gardens, for trailing plants to run over. But it is saving Mr. Watkins more than the value of his rent, this year, after paying for itself. He has put it along his hedges,—not less than fifty pounds worth of it,—where the game has troubled him most; and it seems to answer perfectly. It would do you good to see what crops he has. To

be sure, the fence requires some little watching, and will require more, as the crops come on: for his plan is not looked on kindly from the other side his boundary, as you may suppose: but it will well pay watching.—I wish I had looked at it, and done the like, when I first heard of it, at the farmer's table. It would have cost us from thirty to thirty-five pounds for the fence, without the watching; but it might have saved us I won't say what."

And he sighed,—as he had now a habit of doing.

"We would have raised the money," observed the widow. "It would have been worth some sacrifice to obtain such an object as that. But we had no other idea than that we should do well when the rabbits were killed off."

"I had," said Henry. "I was aware that when the rabbits were reduced, the hares would appear."

"But already!"

"Yes. They will not live much among rabbits; but, the rabbits once gone, they will come miles to feed on Swedes: and you see how they frequent ours already."

The widow shook her head. After a pause, she said, briskly,

"Well, we shall know how the Watkins' fence

has answered, at the end of the season : and then, we can try it next year, and see whether we cannot prosper at last.”

“The question will be how to raise the money to buy it,” said Henry, in a melancholy voice, “if we have such deficient crops as I expect.”

“I did think you would have married this April,” sighed his mother.

“So did I, mother.—But we had better not speak of that.”

“There seems to be scarcely anything cheerful left to speak about,” said she. “O ! about selling the hares you get,—could not we make some better bargain about all the game you kill ?”

“I must see about that by the next season,” said Henry. “It is hard to have to send hares to market, instead of the cattle and sheep we used to take ; and it is but little they can bring us to make up for what they spoil. But I must see about it. If I am not allowed to farm, I must make what I can by snaring and shooting.”

“It is a poor way of spending your time,” said his mother ; “and not the best lesson for Ned.”

“Ned has learned the worst of his lesson already, mother, I’m afraid. He gets beyond my control ; and he has his pocket full of money at times.”

"I gave him half-a-crown a month since, Henry. I assure you I did."

"But I have seen him with gold, mother: and I am convinced it was he who got the harness mended, and was at the bottom of the other secret,—the new dairy pails that nobody could give an account of."

"Bless the boy!" cried the widow.

"Yes; it was kindly done. But he could not have come by the money by proper means. I have many anxious thoughts about Ned, mother: as anxious almost as any."

Ned himself here entered with news that farmer King was taken very ill; and Fanny had sent a messenger to beg that Mrs. Farn would go to them immediately. In ten minutes, she and Henry were off.

Farmer King died. The event appeared at first to cast an additional gloom over the family at Maude-chapel farm; but there is no end to the curious turns in the human lot. In a few weeks Henry came home one day, looking as animated and cheerful as in old times. Fanny and he had arrived at new light about their duty, if not about his affairs. Fanny had always seen, but could never impart her view to her father, that the more Henry suffered from adverse fortune, the more he

needed her sustaining affection in his home: and that, for her, it was far more painful to live in external ease, looking on his struggles, than to share them. In short, Fanny, who had appeared indifferent and high when he was a prosperous young man, was as devoted to him now, in his adversity, as he had ever been to her.

How rejoiced was Mrs. Farn to throw the blame of the long delay on farmer King! How merrily she told Fanny the hard thoughts she had had of her! And with what zeal did she set about making such arrangements as she could for the wedding and new inmate!—The wedding was, of course, to be as quiet an affair as possible: and the preparations for Fanny's reception were no great matter; for really there was no money to spare. The whole amounted to little more than shifting and changing, and furbishing up what was always in use, and bringing out for use a few valued articles which had hitherto been hoarded.

At one stage of the business, Dinah, who had been observed to have tears in her eyes very often at this season of improved cheerfulness to her family, had to discharge her mind of what was upon it. It was some new arrangements about the rooms which compelled her to speak. She said she thought as Fanny was coming, and was

so clever about the dairy, there would be one more at home than was needed. A dairy-maid was now wanted at the Lodge; and she hoped her mother would see it to be a duty that she should apply for the place. She wished to save her maintenance at home, now Henry was reducing the numbers on the farm to the utmost: and she hoped no opposition would be made to her going out to earn her bread.

At first, this was gainsaid with a sort of agony of opposition. Henry and Fanny felt as if they had driven Dinah from home and her mother. But as she was in reason right, and they had nothing but feelings to plead against her purpose, they had to give way.

So, at Midsummer, when Henry brought home his bride, and the two families had dined together in a very sober style, Dinah bade them all good bye at the same time that Fanny's brothers and sister were going away, in order to make the least of the parting. She went to her room for the last time, took off her best clothes, and laid them by in a drawer, unable, in spite of herself, to keep down her choking tears. She hoped she should not meet her mother in going out;—it would make her mother cry all this wedding evening.—Mrs. Farn was on the watch for her, however, in the

fore-court; so Dinah slipped out the back way, and ran through the kitchen garden till the turn to the wood should put her out of sight from the house. On turning that corner, however, she ran into somebody's arms. Henry had waylaid her.

"O! Henry," said she: "to come out about me, on this day of all days!"

"Because on this day you are my own dear sister, more than ever you were before. If we can but prosper again, Dinah, I will come for you, the very first thing."

"Thank you,—good bye," said Dinah, sobbing. "Bid my mother good bye again for me. She is in the fore-court. But be sure you don't tell her I have been crying."

"Don't cry so, dear,—don't! I can't bear it, Dinah! Come back with me, after all."

"No, no! It's nothing. I shall be singing to the cows to-morrow, that they may get to be fond of me,—as ours will get to be fond of Fanny, you know."

And she kissed him once more, and ran on.

When Michaelmas came, prosperity seemed further off than ever. The crops, already impoverished by Henry's inability to farm as highly as the soil required, were again one-fourth de-

stroyed by game,—the hares having come up in proportion as the rabbits went down, and the rabbits being still plentiful enough for much mischief.

It was formerly an object with Henry, as it had been with his father, to keep back his crops from the market till they could command the best prices. But now he was so pressed for money for his rent,—found it so hard to turn himself round at all,—that he was compelled to sell at the earliest possible moment, when, of course, prices were lowest, after harvest. He had sold his wheat, and much of his barley, when he one day met his landlord and another gentleman, out shooting. He opened a gate for them, and was passing on, when Mr. Neville said

“O ! Farn, is that you ? Have you seen Cosby or the keeper about the barley ? Have they told you what barley we shall want ?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Very well. Set that off against the rent, if that is any convenience to you. We are pretty good customers to you this year, eh, Farn ?”

Henry bowed.

“Why, now,—how much have we had from you, this year or two past ?—reckoned in money ? eh ?”

"About fifty pounds worth last year; and it will be a little more this."

"Ah! that is pretty well. In my opinion, it is a great convenience to you to have a market at your own door, as it were."

He looked at his companion, who nodded assent.

"And at your own prices, I hope, Farn.—My people don't beat you down,—do they? They don't dispute your prices?"

"There can be no dispute about market prices, Sir. You have my barley at market prices."

"And without the trouble of carrying it to market. Come now, with all your dislike of the game, you must acknowledge that to be an advantage. Come now, admit that."

"It is just the same to me whether I sell my barley at market or to the Lodge. And you know, Sir, what your people buy is only what is left after your game have got all they can without buying."

Mr. Neville laughed and walked on.

"What an inveterate grumbler that fellow is!" said he to his companion. "I never see him but he comes out with some sauciness like that."

"What sort of a tenant is he? How does he serve your land?"

"O! badly enough. He is not like his father,

who brought the land into very good condition. It is going down now, year by year, Cosby tells me. The mischief is, farmers pretending to farm without capital enough. We want a more substantial set of men, you see. This young fellow works late and early, and is really clever in his business, Cosby tells me: but he can barely turn himself round,—sells off his crops almost before they are reaped, manures less, and employs a man or two less every year, and so on.”

“ Ah ! the land must go down, at that rate. Could not you get rid of him, before it is too late, and put in a man with more capital ? ”

“ Why, I begin to think I had better have taken him at his word when he wanted to throw up his lease, some time since. If he said anything about it now, I think I would. But his mother is a respectable woman,—the widow of the old tenant : that was one thing. And they pay their rent duly. They are really very respectable people ; only they should not attempt to farm without capital enough to do me justice.”

“ You will take care of that point, I suppose, when a new tenant comes upon the land : and that, I imagine, must happen soon. You will make sure of his having capital enough.”

“ I shall. And another thing I shall do : I

shall reserve the game. It was not reserved in this case,—the lease being given before my time. In this case, the occupier is in no way benefited by having the game,—to judge by his wearisome complaints. He is as dissatisfied as any tenant on my property. His having the game has done him little or no good; and it has been a great restriction on me. I shall guard against that in the next lease of Maude-chapel farm.”

“ And I will tell you something else you must do,—by a clause, if you give a lease, and by a clear understanding if you do not. I have seen the advantage of a yearly holding, in a case this last week, and learned a lesson which I may as well give you the benefit of. You know Hartwell farm, on Gerald Benson’s property. We went shooting there one day”

“ Yes, yes, I remember.”

“ The tenant there is one of your saucy fellows about the game. He made a laugh at the farmers’ table at Norwich, a year ago, which has made him cry by this time, I should think. They were grumbling about the game, as usual; and one of them said that there was no use in complaining to the landlord; and, for his part, he would rather, and did rather, suffer in silence, than get his landlord’s ill-will. Whereupon, the man I speak

of, Watkins, said he had a great opinion of the silence, but not of the suffering. There was a laugh, you know, and the thing spread ; and his neighbours kept their eyes on him to see how he would manage.”

“ It will be a new thing if there turns up a farmer who disclaims suffering by game.”

“ Well : what did he do but quietly put a pretty little wire fence all round his best crops,—a new device, you see, which could not have been guarded against in his lease, if he had had one,—which, happily, he had not.”

“ And what happened in regard to the game ?”

“ O ! they were stopped out, almost entirely.”

“ And what were his crops ?”

“ They say, of course, that he has had magnificent crops this year.”

“ Ah ! that is of course. The grumblers will be sure to say that, without regard to the weather, or any other influence than the game.”

“ Gerald Benson has given him notice to quit ; and there you see the benefit of a yearly holding. If you give a lease, however, you will do well to guard against your tenant stopping out the game like so much vermin, in that unhandsome way.”

“ You have got their very word,” said Neville. “ It is the fashion at the farmers’ table to call

game vermin. And in the same breath, they say they don't want it rooted out,—only enough left for gentlemen's sport, without too much damage!"

"Is not that just what we say of foxes?"

"Ah! so it is. I forgot that. But there is somehow a great difference between a fox and a pheasant or a hare."

"Yes, there is certainly.—Now, we shall have a shot! Look at Footfall!"

CHAPTER V.

FOURTH YEAR.

“Now, my dear children, do let us see whether we cannot contrive it,” said widow Farn to Henry and his wife, one night after supper. “If we could accomplish this one point of the wire fence, so as to save our crops this year, who knows what might come of such a beginning? And we cannot have notice to quit served upon us, like Mr. Watkins. We could stay, and reap the advantage. Cannot we make the effort?”

“It is too late, mother,” said Henry. “We are too far gone. Look at the condition of the land and the buildings! Nothing that we could get out of that land now would repair those buildings, after maintaining us; and our stock . . .”

“The truth is, Henry, you have lost your spirit. Is it not so?”

“It may be, mother. It well may be. But as a matter of figures,—I could show you from my books that we should not be justified in raising money now for any further efforts on this farm.

Fanny's brothers are very kind ; but it would be dishonest, in my opinion, to use their money in the same business in which we have lost nearly a thousand pounds of our own."

" Ah ! how many years of thrift and industry, and hope and fear, did it cost your father and me to gather that thousand pounds ! and how soon it is gone ! "

" It is a bitter thought to me, mother."

" My dear son, you should not say that, if you mean that you are thinking of me."

" And Dinah, mother, and poor Ned."

" Why, Henry, it is no fault of yours. We did hope to have a little portion for Dinah, and to see Ned"

She stopped a moment, but in consideration for Henry, presently went on.

" We did make our little plans, and have our little wishes for you all. But it does not rest with us to bring them to pass. All that any one could do, you have done, Henry. If it had been otherwise, I should have been miserable indeed. As it is, my dear son, I am very happy in you,—should be quite happy, through everything, but for"

She could not again name Ned ; and it made the strong-hearted Fanny's eyes overflow to see

the quivering lips,—quivering with grief, which spoke of happiness.

“Come, Fanny, dear, tell us what you think,” said Mrs. Farn, clearing her voice, and resuming her ordinary tone of cheerfulness.

“I think as Henry does, that we had better not attempt anything more here. Whatever my brothers will be kind enough to lend us will be best employed, I think, in settling us, when we are obliged to leave this farm.”

“And when will that be, Henry?”

“Whenever we cannot pay the rent, mother; and that, I suppose, will be next Michaelmas.”

“God bless me, Henry! What shall we do? Where shall we go? I don’t see how we can take another farm.”

“No, mother; do not hope it. We shall be sold up, and have nothing left.”

There was a pause. Mrs. Farn was the first to speak.

“I *have* heard of such things, my dears; and people *have* got over such a such a”

“Ours is no uncommon case now,” said Henry. “But I must, and ever will say that it is a very hard one. It is becoming more and more common for people of our class to be ruined wholly and solely by game.”

"There is some small comfort in being ruined in such a way," Fanny declared. "The mischief must come to an end, mother, when many such as you and Henry are ruined in a way so shocking and absurd. And, for my part, I have no notion of being ashamed of it. I am rather disposed to hold up my head, and say 'Come and look at us. Here we are,—working hard, spending little, understanding our business, and left untouched by misfortune from God;—here we are ruined wholly and solely by our landlord's game! Come and see!'"

"Bravo! Fanny," cried her husband; seeing that his mother smiled.

"And then," Fanny went on, "I think they could not but see the sin and folly of this way of game-preserving. There was something manly and reasonable in men finding pleasure in sport when they pursued animals that were naturally on the land; and nobody would object now to any amount of that sport, done at any amount of damage by the way. But I do say that the original notion of sporting was neither more nor less than getting rid of a nuisance in a pleasant way; whether it was against lions or bears, or boars or deer, or hares and pheasants: and now, to nourish up a nuisance at other people's expense, in order to put

it down for one's own pleasure, is such child's play,—such insolent and ignorant child's play,—that I can't conceive how any grown man can stoop to it."

"Bravo! Fanny!"

"We see our labourers," continued Fanny, "set up nine-pins, to knock them down again: and very innocent sport that is; for the nine-pins spoil no wheat and bite no turnips, while the labourers' children have not enough to eat: nor do they take work out of the labourers' hands, as the four-footed nine-pins do. O! if we could but persuade the gentlemen at the Lodge to knock down nine-pins instead of hares and pheasants, what a fine thing it would be for this neighbourhood! Or, if we could make a few mock pheasants and hares for them, like flies for fishing and automaton mice, that might be bait enough to draw them into the country, without so much damage to us;—if indeed, they cannot relish the country without a treat of child's play. Or, I have no doubt we could do very well without them if they would go to the moors, instead of coming here. They can shoot away there, as much as they please, without hurting anybody."

"They would tell you that you know nothing about the matter, Fanny. They would say you can know nothing of manly sports."

"Then my answer would be that either they know nothing of the ruin caused by their sports, or, if they do know, they are anything but manly to pursue sport at such a cost. And I am more sure of the soundness of my answer than of the truth of their objection. Do not let us give way, mother;—do not let us give way, Henry, if it should come to the worst. I could bear to be sold up, if it would but make thinking people look into the cause."

"No, my dear; we will never give way," said widow Farn.

It did come to the worst. They were sold up, the next Michaelmas. It was a bitter season, but they weathered it: and this was partly owing to Fanny's spirit.—By the aid of friends, they were set up in a public-house in the neighbourhood where they were so well known and so much respected. Fanny wanted to have it called the Hare and Hammer, saying that this would bring the custom of all the discontented farmers round. But it was thought that this would hardly do, either in point of manners or policy. However many farmers felt with this ruined family, and understood the cause of their ruin, few would venture to say so in so clear a way as by patronising a public-house which should appear to defy the Lodge.

There seemed some excuse for Mr. Neville's way of thinking and acting when it was seen how many applications were made for Maude-chapel farm, on and before the day of the auction. Though Mr. Neville reserved the game, and stipulated that the tenant should preserve it, there were applicants who took his simple word that they should never be injured by the game. It can hardly be averred that these applicants were wholly satisfied by this mere assurance ; but they thought it would be ill-mannered to press for further security, or more precision in terms : and all hoped that, by some means or other, they should contrive to prosper better than poor Farn had done.

Mr. Neville was not wholly satisfied, either, though he was able to point to the number of applications for the farm. It struck him that there were no men of any substance among the applicants,—no men of good capital, skill or knowledge. He suspected that they were tempted by the lowness of the rent ; and he observed to Cosby that it was very odd—what a propensity men had to go into the farming business without a sufficiency of capital ;—he supposed the same thing would happen over and over again that had happened with poor Farn, who had split on that rock of insufficient capital ; that it really was very hard

on the landlord, not only to have his tenants fail in their rents, but to be compelled to sell them up,—which was anything but pleasant to his feelings.

He then asked whether it was true that the Farns were about to open a public-house in the neighbourhood; and desired Cosby to have his eye on them, as it would not do to have such a place made a rendezvous for poachers, as he thought it likely to become, from young Farn's inveterate enmity to the game, and from his having a brother who had certainly taken to bad courses with the poachers of the neighbourhood.—Mr. Cosby said what he could for the respectability of the family,—all but Ned;—but Mr. Neville told him that no young man ever set himself, as Farn had done, against his landlord, and the interests of the gentry, without there being some vice at the bottom of it; and that he would see this family going further down the road to ruin yet.

This was apparently true before long. At first, the public-house appeared to answer; but, between its real respectability, which made it no place of resort for the class whose patronage, in the vicinity of game-preserves, is the most lucrative, and the

suspicion with which Mr. Neville was known to regard it, and which Tucker took care to foster, the custom of the place fell off. Henry would not await another insolvency; and the rather because the family discovered to each other that this was a way of life most disagreeable to each of them; and that they would rather live in the humblest cottage that they could have to themselves than lead the disturbed life of a public-house on any terms.

So, to a very humble cottage they have gone. There lives Henry, a farm labourer on ten shillings a week, looking, in three years, twenty years older, from his grizzled hair and furrowed brow,—rarely speaking when outside of his own fence, and still somewhat shrinking from people of his own class,—for Fanny's sake,—not from false pride in himself. Fanny is more than ever the lady of his soul. Her bright smile when she sets on the table the rare occasional meal of bacon, her clever merriment with the baby in her arms, are to him more exquisite than he thinks any other man ever conceived of. The only tears that he has seen wrung from her were about this infant in her arms,—when her husband was thinking aloud one day about whether it was possible that any child of hers should be destined to

grow up a clod-pole like the children of most people in their circumstances. At the moment, she said nothing, because she could not speak: but afterwards she told him that she had been thinking about that matter, and her opinion was that they must educate their children to the utmost of their power,—give them of their own knowledge and habits of mind, trusting that their Maker would, in his own time, place them in circumstances favourable to the exercise of their powers.

“You know,” said she, “this is the case of all of us under God’s rule. Every one of us is a great, immortal being in humble and confined circumstances, with powers cramped up in us which we hope to use hereafter in a better place. Let us take example by our Father’s method with us all, and do the same, as nearly as we can, with our own children.”

“ You are right,” replied her husband. And his eyes rested on the family Bible,—the only article they had saved of all they had at Maude-chapel farm. “ By that book, and our own constant endeavours, we will try, Fanny, with God’s blessing, what we can do for our children.”

Dinah remains dairy-maid at the Lodge. She is so well approved that Mr. Neville has more than

once told her, on meeting her with her pails, that she may ask Tucker now and then for a hare for her mother, for whom he has a respect.

She has a few hours on Sundays, between church and milking time, when she goes down to the cottage. She gives her mother her arm for a little walk ; and that walk is always to the same place ;—to the rising ground on the old farm, whence the sea-view may be had. Mrs. Farn is not old ; but Dinah suspects that night-weeping has dimmed her eyes ; for she cannot now discern the light-house. Now and then, however, she catches the flash and sparkle of the sunny sea ; and then her heart springs up, as young as ever. In those walks she confesses that she did think that Henry, so sensible and clever as he is, was made for prosperity, as she used (too presumptuously perhaps) to say : but that it is not for her to complain. Wherever and however she may be destined to die, it has pleased God that she should live the best part of her life in this beautiful place ; and there cannot be a sweeter spot in the world than Maude-chapel farm.

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